Rugby Union International: Wales 20 South Africa 28

Springboks tame the fiery dragon

Ian Malin at Wembley

SCOTT GIBBS was the first player down the tunnel at the end of this breathtaking match. He never looked back as Nick Mallett, the Springboks' coach, put a consoling arm around Gibbs's inconsolable team-mates while the chants "Wales, Wales" reverberated around Wembley Stadium.

Gibbs could not wait for the desolate silence of the dressing-room. Because his team had believed that not only could they stand toe-to-toe with the world champions, they could have beaten them.

Wales, a nation whose glorious history has been mocked by a wretched recent past, are also refusing to look back. Graham Henry, the coach from New Zealand for whom this was a baptism of fire, said of the 96-13 defeat in Pretoria last June: "We did not even think of that day. We are not dwelling on the past, just adapting to the present."

Most critics had dreaded another thumping for Wales. Instead, the heavy tanks of South Africa, who had arrived in Britain intent on rolling over the four nations on successive Saturdays, needed to be extra flame-resistant. They were met by a dragon emerging from its cave and breathing fire again.

Even the Welsh Rugby Union president, Sir Tasker Watkins, talked in doom-laden terms in the match programme of "staring into an abyss" when he had witnessed the biggest defeat in history of a major rugby nation five months ago.

But only three players survived from that under-strength side, and Gibbs, the captain Robert Howley, Scott Quinnell and Neil Jenkins have been victorious with the Lions in South Africa. The backbone of this Wales team are proud men and, as Howley said, "We were not prepared to be the whipping boys any longer."

And so, as the game approached the end of 80 minutes, the teams were locked at 20-20 and Wales seemed at least assured of a "winning draw" to match England's 26-26 result at Twickenham last December which had deprived the All Blacks of a 100 per cent record for 1997. The Springboks then found the extra reserves that distinguish great sides from good ones.

From a line-out close to the Welsh 22, Joost van der Westhuizen attacked after the ensuing maul. The scrum-half's pass was knocked into the air by Johan Erasmus and Andre Venter, Erasmus's back-row colleague, plunged over. South Africa were off the ropes and six minutes into stoppage time, Franco Smith's third penalty ensured a 15th successive Test win.

The extra minutes had been added on by the Australian referee Stuart Dickinson because of injuries — and a streaker.

Welsh concentration was disturbed, and the South Africans came storming back. Wave after wave of attacks crashed against the red defensive wall. Images of Stanley Baker and Rorke's Drift kept hoving into view, until Wales were at last penalised for offside and Smith kicked an equalising penalty.

Wales's fate was settled, though, in a calamitous two-minute period late in the first half. After 33 minutes the Springboks were, astonishingly, 14-0 adrift. Gareth Thomas's well-taken try after eight minutes and especially the three penalties of Jenkins brought back memories of those Lions' Test victories.

But when Howley attempted to run a penalty from close to his line, Wales lost the ball, conceded a scrum and then, when their front row stood up, conceded a harsh penalty try. From the restart Pieter Rossouw counter-attacked, for once the tackle of Jenkins was mistimed, and Van der Westhuizen was handed a gift try.



Up for grabs . . . Colin Charvis of Wales tries to steal possession off South Africa's Pieter Rossouw PHOTOGRAPH: BRANDON MALONE

He broke Welsh hearts, but Henry's plan to pick a side which could match the Springboks and play bold, ball-in-hand rugby, had shaken the visitors. Scotland could feel the backlash this Saturday.

As Mallett said: "We get judged on the quality of our win rather than our winning. No Springbok side since the sixties has had this burden of expectation. We're not looking for excuses, but it was difficult to prepare against a side we had not seen before. This was a different Wales, playing a different game."

Shane Howarth, the former All Black who had performed so brilliantly on his Wales debut at full-back, offered the thought: "All the good work will come to nothing if we fail to beat Argentina next weekend." And he added: "How was my Welsh accent?" Sounded perfect, Shane, *bach*.

Robert Armstrong adds: England, mindful of the major hurdles round the corner, took only passing satisfaction from their biggest international win over a motley collection of carpenters, policemen, students and computer consultants in their World Cup qualifier at the McAlpine Stadium, Huddersfield.

Clive Woodward, the England coach, will not dwell long on the record 16 tries that helped put the Netherlands to the sword by 110-0 as he considers his options for Sunday's game against a dangerous-looking Italian side at the same Yorkshire venue.

While it was pleasing to see England moving the ball sweetly through hands like French backs on a good day, it will be more relevant to discover whether they falter under pressure against the super-fit, shrewdly organised Italians.

Meanwhile Ireland dispatched Georgia 70-0 in their qualifier at Lansdowne Road, much to the relief of coach Warren Gatland who saw his side end a string of seven successive defeats.

At Murrayfield despite a performance that was an improvement on their recent gruesome form, Scotland still went down to an emphatic 24-8 defeat in the Tour match against the New Zealand Maoris.

Rugby League

Kiwis denied a whitewash

Andy Wilson at Vicarage Road

GREAT BRITAIN's 23-23 draw against New Zealand last Saturday avoided a whitewash and will have given them heart ahead of the 2000 World Cup.

Neil Tunnicliffe, the chief executive of the Rugby Football League, had compared the background to the third Test to that of the third in Sydney 10 years ago when an injury-hit Great Britain, written off after a 34-14 mauling by Australia in Brisbane, achieved a stunning 26-12 success. That victory marked the start of seven years of international credibility.

Midway through the second half here the Lions were staring at a repeat of the second Test capitulation at Bolton. The wonderfully talented Kiwis tore an eight-point half-time deficit to shreds with three dazzling tries by the Paul brothers.

But this time Great Britain, led by their half-backs Sean Long and Tony Smith, and bolstered by the impressive debutant hooker Terry Newton, hung in and fought back.

Long's individual try, the highlight of a bubbly first starting appearance, cut the deficit to 22-16 and even after Stacey Jones's drop goal had given New Zealand extra breathing space, Great Britain forged a 78th-minute try from Smith following good work by Long, Keith Senior and Francis Cummins. Then they snatched the draw through Smith's first drop goal from the last kick of the game.

"Great Britain have got a side they can build on for the World Cup," said New Zealand's generous coach Frank Endacott. "They've got some good players who will be cherry ripe for the World Cup." So will New Zealand.

The forward nucleus of this team — Stephen Kearney, Jarrod McCracken and the captain Quentin Pongia — each have at least two more years in them, and Henry and Robbie Paul have come of age on the international stage. Jones, a runaway Man of the Series, may already be the best scrum-half in the world at the age of 22.

Andy Goodway, the Great Britain coach, will now work with Tunnicliffe and the RFL's technical director Joe Lydon to squeeze some decent preparation for next year's tri-series into a season already over-congested by the Super League clubs' expansion to 30 rounds.

"For all the inexperience in the side, they have performed magnificently over the past three weeks," said Goodway. "But we're only eight months into a three-year job. We feel there is a lot more to come."

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The Washington Post · Le Monde

Russia mourns the assassination of popular MP Galina Starovoitova



An elderly man in St Petersburg offers flowers to Galina Starovoitova's memory PHOTO: ALEXANDER DEMIANCHUK

A shot in the heart of democracy

James Meek in Moscow

A LITTLE over four years ago, a woman stood in the biting wind of a dank October day in Moscow, in front of the Palace of Youth, listening to a journalist speak to a crowd of mourners grieving over the death of a colleague, 27-year-old Dmitri Kholodov, whose legs had been blown off by a suitcase bomb in his office.

"The real dividing line in Russia today is not between communists and democrats, but between honest and dishonest people," said the speaker, Alexander Minkin.

The woman was Galina Starovoitova, one of Russia's most uncompromising democratic idealists. On Friday last week, she became the latest victim of the assassin's bullet. Her political allies believe that she fell as a combatant in the struggle between "democrats" and "red-browns" — the communist-nationalist forces hoping one day to rule Russia. Whether this was the case, or whether she died in a more tortured Russian struggle between honesty and dishonesty, good and evil, crime and punishment, only the detectives can say for certain. And their record on high-profile hits is not good.

Like the Kholodov killing, the Starovoitova murder enters history posing as a turning-point in Russia's post-Soviet struggle for law and order. But, the cynics would argue, what has changed? Then, as now, it seemed clear that the slaying had been political. Then, as now, president Boris Yeltsin promised personally to ensure that the case was solved. Then, as on Tuesday at the Alexander Nevsky monastery in St Petersburg, a vast crowd of ordinary people vented their grief at the death of someone who still dared to fight the fight against cynicism they had given themselves up to. Politicians have wrung their hands, detectives and forensic scientists have swarmed over the crime scene — and no one has been charged. No one has been tried. No one is guilty.

Starovoitova, an MP representing the party Democratic Russia, died from three bullets to the head after entering the stairwell in the canal-side tenement in central St Petersburg where she had her flat.

She died immediately. Her spokesman, Ruslan Linkov, who was with her, was hit in the back of the head and in the neck, but survived. The killers abandoned their weapons on the scene, as is usual in Russian hits.

> **There is a well of hatred sunk deep into Russia. And weapons are all too easy to come by**

The weapons were unusual — not the Russian-made TT pistol and Kalashnikov of rank-and-file criminals. One was a Beretta pistol, which, according to unspecified forensic traces left on the trigger, was fired by a woman; the other was an Argan-2000 machine pistol, once favoured by US special forces but now manufactured under licence in the former Yugoslavia.

The Balkan connection has led St Petersburg democrats to make a link with the "red-browns". Russian nationalists and self-styled Cossacks did fight on the Serbian side in the Yugoslav wars, and there are indisputable ties linking Serbian extremism, post-Soviet conflicts such as the war in Moldova, and radical Russian politicians such as the anti-semite MP Albert Makashov, whom Starovoitova clashed with a few days before her death.

"The most likely version is that the hand of the red-brown bigots is behind this," said Sergei Alexeyev, deputy chairman of the executive committee of Democratic Russia's St Petersburg branch. "Galina spoke in favour of passing a law on the forbidding of communist and fascist activity in Russia. She considered both equally dangerous for democracy. The communists stated that this was a witchhunt. And now we see that the red-browns went a-hunting themselves."

The evidence is circumstantial. Yet there is a well of hatred sunk deep into Russia of which General Makashov is only the mouth. There are numerous fascist and extreme neo-communist groups who share a vicious anti-Semitism with a broader hostility towards all foreigners and a cult of militarism. And in Russia, weapons are all too easy to come by.

Starovoitova was one of the few remaining active liberals from the early days of Yeltsin's anti-communist struggle who combined all the facets that the extremists actively despise and many ordinary Russians passively dislike — multiculturalism, political pluralism and the idea of a law-based society. But she went further: she was radical on every front, as economically liberal

continued on page 3

Obituary, page 5

Pentagon to trim nuclear arsenal

Martin Kettle in Washington

THE Pentagon is planning big unilateral reductions in the United States' nuclear weapons arsenal, according to reports in Washington which military chiefs conspicuously failed to deny on Monday.

If implemented by the Clinton administration and approved by Congress, the cuts would take US stockpiles below the 6,000 warheads level allowed by the Start 1 arms limitation treaty, and would save the Pentagon hundreds of millions of dollars.

Washington's readiness to press ahead with a fresh round of cuts came as the US defence secretary, William Cohen, roundly attacked the German government's proposals for Nato to adopt a "no first use" nuclear weapons policy.

"It is an integral part of our strategic concept and we think it should remain exactly as it is," Mr Cohen said. "There is good rationale for keeping it as it is."

The German-US argument is likely to intensify in the build-up to Nato's 50th anniversary summit in Washington next April, and will inevitably put other European Nato powers — including Britain — on the spot. But the Pentagon's determination to stamp on any rethink of the doctrine co-exists with its evident readiness to cut US stockpiles, another issue with implications for nuclear powers such as Britain.

For several weeks the Clinton administration and Pentagon officials have been privately discussing ways in which nuclear weapons levels can be reduced below Start 1 levels without waiting for Russia to ratify the Start 2 treaty. This pact demands a reduction of nuclear warheads to 3,000-3,500 and was signed in 1993, but it has been before the Russian parliament ever since.

On Monday the Pentagon said that no report on fresh arms reduction plans had been circulated to Mr Cohen, but this limited denial underlines the likelihood that the issue is about to return to centre stage.

The principal pressure on the Pentagon is financial. Russia's delay in signing Start 2, and a US law prohibiting unilateral cuts below Start 1 levels, mean the US defence department is having to spend huge and growing sums maintaining — and even rebuilding — weapons it has committed itself to scrapping.

According to one report, the costs of delay will mount steeply. Over the two years the Pentagon has spent $95 million it would have saved had Start 2 taken effect.

The US navy alone faces spending more than $5 billion between now and 2003 to refuel nuclear reactors and install new missiles on four Trident submarines that should otherwise have been dismantled.

Officially, the administration line remains that no discussions are expected before the Russian parliament completes its latest discussions of Start 2. A vote in the lower house could come next month.

But with Mr Clinton's presentation of the federal budget for 2000 to the newly elected Congress just weeks away, and with the annual State of the Union speech due on January 20, the pressure on the administration to find extra savings is intensifying.

Administration officials believe that the budget pressures are even more daunting in Moscow, and that they open up the possibility that Russia's economic crisis will finally force the parliament to ratify Start 2. Regardless of events in Moscow, there are increasing signs that the Clinton administration is prepared to press on alone.

"You will inevitably see us take some unilateral actions . . . to modernise our forces and maybe streamline our forces," the head of US strategic command, Admiral Richard Mies said.

Aside from the budget squeeze, political pressures for a US initiative are also increasing. In a speech last week a Democratic senator, Bob Kerrey, called on the administration to make unilateral nuclear cuts to reassure Russia and re-energise the reduction process.

Under Start 1 the US has reduced its strategic nuclear warheads from 10,000 to about 7,000. Last year Mr Clinton and President Yeltsin of Russia agreed that they would begin talks on reductions to 2,000-2,500 warheads each, once Start 2 was approved.

Comment, page 14
Washington Post, page 17

Austria	AS30	Malta	60c
Belgium	BF80	Netherlands	G 5
Denmark	DK17	Norway	NK 16
Finland	FM 10	Portugal	E300
France	FF 14	Saudi Arabia	SR 6.50
Germany	DM 4	Spain	P 300
Greece	DR 500	Sweden	SK 19
Hungary	HUF 600	Switzerland	SF 3.80
Italy	L 3,500		

Climate change forecast taken with a pinch of salt

THERE are essential differences between estimates, exploratory calculations and forecasts or predictions. May I recommend to Paul Brown (Greenhouse effect worse than feared, November 8) that he read Chapter 15 of Small Is Beautiful, by Dr E F Schumacher, before he swallows whole and then regurgitates such things as the Hadley Centre for Climate Change's recent "findings".

Were he to look at them in detail he would almost certainly find that a number of trends measured with doubtful accuracy have been put into a mathematical model of completely unknown accuracy to produce the "startling findings" which he reports in detail. To treat such "findings" as serious forecasts is ludicrous.

If we turn to Fred Pearce's article on page 27 we have much more food for thought, and a reasonable selection of ideas from a huge conference. But again, beware the seductive numbers: "By cutting subsidies for coal China had triggered efficiency gains at power stations that reduced CO_2 emissions by 155 million tonnes a year" — a virtually meaningless statement without further information. Cutting subsidies increases fuel cost and thus electricity cost.

Does he mean that by cutting subsidies the Chinese forced a drop in consumption, with a saving in CO_2 emissions? Did the increase in fuel costs lead to the closure of inefficient power stations which had emitted all that CO_2? Or does he believe that increasing fuel costs would actually force an increase in the thermal efficiency of power stations and hence reduce their emissions per kilowatt-hour generated? Would that life were that simple.

But, keep on reporting on this enormously important topic, please.
Don Montague,
Serres-et-Montguyard, France

"THE figures show that the Earth is heating up fast, with 1998 already the hottest year since reliable records began 140 years ago." For which parts of the world did "reliable records" begin 140 years ago? And 140 years is a tear drop in the ocean, affording no statistical significance at all. In Anglo-Saxon England vineyards were cultivated as far north as York.

The human race has survived all kinds of climate fluctuations, but never did hysterical doom-merchants working on totally unsound bases of "information" contribute to the ability to survive.

If you wanted to give sound information, you would quote your sources, provide hard facts to support your claim. "Thousands of calculations made by the world's biggest super-computer" are not evidence. Who put what into the computer?
Paul Worthington,
Reutlingen, Germany

IN HOW Many People Can the Earth Support, the distinguished biologist Joel Cohen wrote: "The more confidence someone places in an unconditional prediction of what will happen in human affairs, the less confidence you should place in that prediction."

That is why multinational corporations and conservative think-tanks will gloat over the Hadley Centre's report. Concrete facts give plenty of cause for alarm. We poison the land, the air, and the waters. We pour gases into the atmosphere, some with known, and more with unknown, effects. The list could go on and on. Perhaps, worst of all, we destroy the forests that provide the best hope that nature might recover from the devastation we spread.

Too-precise predictions are something else again. The exploiters twist scientists' and environmentalists' honest doubts. People don't know what to believe. Why worry?
Frank Stewart,
Brown University, Rhode Island, USA

Is Blair head of the 51st state?

AS an older person, I am stunned and even shocked at how dramatically power politics can change, even within the same century. Specifically, with regard to the latest Iraqi crisis, it's as though Tony Blair spoke to Bill Clinton on the telephone and said: "Hello Bill. This is Third Way Tony. I just want you to know, Bill, that Airstrip One will always be at your side."

Britain doesn't have to be like this: France and Germany are not like this. Everyone knows that Britain does this in order to distance itself from the European Union — but the Americans are always asking for way too high a price. Just by way of a novel comparison, Spain and Portugal aren't looking to the western hemisphere countries in order to distance themselves from the EU. Neither should Britain.

The British prime minister is going to have to take steps to extricate himself from a position where he is regarded by the people in Washington as the governor of the 51st state. Britain is going to have to swallow its pride and make the bitter decision to enter into a serious, genuine and equal partnership with France and Germany within the EU from now on. The other 14 EU countries already recognise English, and not French or German, as the official language of Europe. Britain has a head start. We must not continue to bury our heads in the past.
James A Andrews,
Tolo, Greece

IT IS reported that the United States government is spending about $1.5 billion a week building and maintaining an armed force in the Persian Gulf area, presumably to protect the flow of cheapish oil into its nation's thirsty petrol tanks, overuse of which is leading to environmental changes causing devastating events such as Hurricane Mitch.
Jock Coats,
Oxford

Burma cries out for intervention

ANOTHER very impressive edition of Le Monde diplomatique offers a timely reminder of the horror that is Burma. Much concern has been expressed by the international community, and in particular certain members of Asean, over the arrest of Anwar Ibrahim in recent days, and this should be welcomed by all concerned with human rights.

It would be unfortunate, however, if this concern were not extended to Burma — a fellow member of Asean and in the grip of a regime playing in an altogether different league of oppression.

Unlike Malaysia, which detains Anwar under some old colonial laws, the Burmese military regime barely even pretends to adhere to due process and the rule of law. Human rights monitors routinely record the regime's arrest of hundreds of elected representatives, its repression of dissent, its perpetuation of torture, its use of slave labour, and its role in the trafficking of drugs.

Surely it is about time that the international community, and Asean in particular, extend to Burma the sort of intervention that they have now thankfully decided is appropriate in the case of the unfortunate Anwar.
Sean Turnell,
Macquarie University,
Sydney, Australia

Nancy doesn't take KL's fancy

OH DEAR, Our Nancy! You're a constant source of comfort and joy, and we love you dearly, but it seems you're geographically challenged (Banished to the boondocks, November 8). Your slights on Kuala Lumpur are baseless.

How could Raquel be "cruelly" packed off to KL? She's probably enjoying a far higher standard of living here than she could ever have dreamed of in The Street, and at this very moment is likely to be lounging beside a swimming pool, G&T clutched in one hand, chortling over her luck.

The worst slight is your being unable to quite place KL. How could you possibly be unable to place the city which recently hosted the Apec meeting and Al Gore? The city which hosted the recent Commonwealth Games, whose anthem assured us "the world is watching Malaysia" (if they weren't then, I dare say they are now)? The city with the world's tallest building and the tallest flagpole? The country which not long ago took its national car to the North Pole (they brought it back again — probably the wrong sort of snow for it)?

Clearly you haven't been paying attention, Nancy. I would suggest that you sit up straight, stop fidgeting and listen properly in future.
Janet Halliday,
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Briefly

YOUR clever, front-page juxtaposition of the September "Crisis in Wall Street" story, and the November 7 "Crisis in Central America" story, almost lost its undoubted force for this reader when I looked down and saw, in bold colour underneath, an advertisement by the Royal Bank of Scotland promoting "offshore accounts" (read "tax minimisation schemes") offering a return of up to 85 per cent.

Not quite hoisted on your own petard, nor evidence of a double standard; but I do hope just a little embarrassing, and perhaps a little admonitory?
(Prof) David Corson,
University of Toronto, Canada

AS ALWAYS, like when someone suggested that all the Falkland islanders and all their sheep should have been transported to a Shetland island to solve the crisis with which Mrs Thatcher claims General Pinochet assisted Britain so efficaciously, the answer to what to do with the former dictator is simple to the extreme: release him to live in Belgravia with Maggie: a fate worse than extradition or execution.
Denis Hawthorne,
Redbank, New Jersey, USA

BY WHAT strange interpretation of the law can the word "sovereign" be applied to a dictator who usurped power by military might, who murdered scores of countrymen in the process and then continued on for years with a reign of terror. Hopefully the House of Lords will see the difference.
Leo Donnelly,
Huasahuasi, Peru

AS ONE of a team from Exeter university that has been studying wild beaver in France for several years, I would strongly support their reintroduction to Britain on grounds of increased biodiversity (November 22). The overall range of plant and animal species, and the number of any one species, increase in their wake. You could almost argue that you don't need conservation officers, providing you have a resident beaver family.
(Prof) Bryony Coles,
University of Exeter

JOAN DONALDSON (November 8) suggests calling United States citizens Usians. Why not Yanks? It refers only to the US, it isn't Newspeak, and it derives from Yankees, to whom humanity owes undying gratitude for the Civil War in which they crushed the world's last major redoubt of those who owned human beings.
Dion Giles,
Fremantle, WA, Australia

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Iraqi deputy survives grenade attack

Maggie O'Kane in Baghdad and Ian Black in London

ONE OF Saddam Hussein's leading lieutenants narrowly escaped an attempted assassination, state television reported this week.

Izzat Ibrahim, President Saddam's vice-chairman on the ruling Revolutionary Command Council, was targeted in broad daylight while attending a religious ceremony in the holy city of Kerbala, Baghdad television said. The attackers threw two grenades at Mr Ibrahim as he got out of his car. Several of his bodyguards were wounded.

Monday's act of defiance in the mainly Shia city follows attacks last week on local members of the ruling Ba'ath party in the southern city of al-Amarah.

Government officials are nervous of travelling south of Baghdad, particularly to the hostile cities of Kerbala and Najaf. On the road between the capital and the south this week government forces could be seen manning at least 10 roadblocks.

Opposition sources warned that the grenade incident would be exploited by the regime: "Saddam will be trying to send a message that the Iraqi opposition are a bunch of terrorists," said one exiled official.

Mr Ibrahim has been with Saddam since the Iraqi leader came to power in 1979. He is also a deputy commander of the armed forces.

Meanwhile Iraq has again been obstructing the work of UN weapons inspectors, just days after President Saddam agreed to permit unconditional weapons inspections to avoid the threat of air strikes by the United States and Britain. The latest difficulty concerns Iraq's refusal to hand over documents requested by the chief UN arms inspector, Richard Butler. Mr Butler believes the documents could throw light on Iraq's forbidden chemical and biological weapons programmes. So far Iraq has resisted, saying the documents were either unavailable or that their release would jeopardise Iraq's national security.

The US and Britain responded by criticising Iraq's refusal to hand over the documents, but made it clear that no military action was planned, even though both President Clinton and Britain's Tony Blair had threatened to launch air strikes without warning at the first sign of Iraqi intransigence.

Izzat Ibrahim: narrow escape

Israel frees hundreds of prisoners

David Sharrock in Maythalun, West Bank

IT WAS a good but a sombre day for Mohammed Ne'irat, the longest-serving Palestinian prisoner in Israeli jails. As Israel withdrew from 500 square kilometres of the West Bank and released 250 prisoners, including Mr Ne'irat, the old man seemed to think there was little cause to celebrate.

In spite of official Palestinian efforts to stir up a festive atmosphere in the villages around the northern city of Jenin as Israel's long-delayed redeployment began, Mr Ne'irat's mood seemed infectious.

Over a lunch of *musakhan*, the Palestinian speciality of chicken wrapped in fragrant onions and flat bread, Mr Ne'irat, aged 72, listened politely to his cousin, Hussein al-Araj, deputy minister in Yasser Arafat's local government ministry.

Mr Ne'irat's face remained impassive, his grey moustache barely flickered. "I've been away only 23 years," he said, drawing a bitter laugh from his family. "There are some changes for the better."

But he was not impressed by the 250 prisoners released by Israel. "Most of them are car thieves," he harrumphed. He is right. Most of the first batch of some 750 prisoners Israel has promised to free as part of the Wye land-for-security agreement are petty criminals.

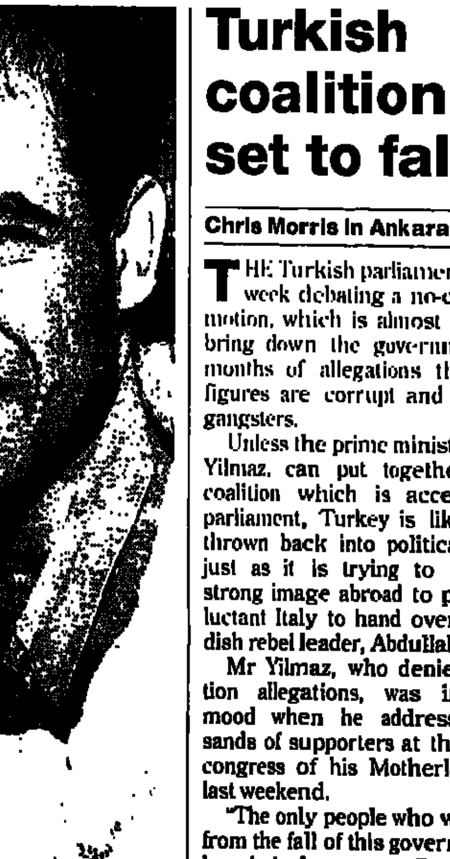
Mr Ne'irat is an exception. In 1975 he killed an Israeli bus driver who transported Palestinian labourers to jobs across the green line.

"There have been many requests for his release but they were always rejected until now," Mr Araj said. "My cousin is not a killer, he is a soldier. This is why we are working to prevent further killings."

Perhaps because of his age or his failing health, the Israelis relented.

And is the war over? A deafening "No!" rose from the lunch guests, then Mr Ne'irat spoke. "The struggle continues as long as one inch of our land remains occupied. Of course, all those years in prison were worth it. If you see someone coming to occupy your land do you strew their path with flowers?"

Washington Post, page 18



Ahmed Obeid, a freed Palestinian, hugs his mother PHOTO: AHMED JADALLAH

Turkish coalition set to fall

Chris Morris in Ankara

THE Turkish parliament was this week debating a no-confidence motion, which is almost certain to bring down the government after months of allegations that senior figures are corrupt and linked to gangsters.

Unless the prime minister, Mesut Yilmaz, can put together a new coalition which is acceptable to parliament, Turkey is likely to be thrown back into political turmoil just as it is trying to present a strong image abroad to press a reluctant Italy to hand over the Kurdish rebel leader, Abdullah Ocalan.

Mr Yilmaz, who denies corruption allegations, was in defiant mood when he addressed thousands of supporters at the national congress of his Motherland party last weekend.

"The only people who will benefit from the fall of this government will be criminal gangs, profiteers, smugglers and terrorists," he said.

He argues that he is being brought down precisely because he has tried to combat the influence of organised crime in political life.

The taint of corruption, however, has damaged most of Turkey's main parties during the past year. The latest allegations involve illegal interference in the sale of a state bank worth more than $500 million.

The government led by Mr Yilmaz is a minority coalition which has survived only with the tacit support of the opposition Republican People's party, or CHP. This month the CHP announced that the deal was over.

The issue dominating politics is the drama that has unfolded since Mr Ocalan, leader of the Kurdistan Workers party (PKK), arrived in Italy on November 12 and said he wanted asylum.

Rome's reluctance to extradite him has led to angry street protests in Turkey and threats to break off diplomatic ties if Mr Ocalan's asylum plea is accepted.

Turks rallied by the thousands in front of the Italian embassy in Ankara last weekend in strident protest after a Rome court rejected Turkey's extradition request and freed Mr Ocalan from detention. Hundreds of companies and business groups have announced a boycott of Italian goods.

Death of a democrat

Continued from page 1

as the reviled privatisation guru Anatoly Chubais, as pro-Western as anyone and as vocal in her demand for human rights as the late Andrei Sakharov.

Starovoitova is the sixth Russian MP to be killed since the break-up of the Soviet Union. Yet her murder is more sinister than that of many of the other political and journalistic killings of the post-Soviet years, because so far the most likely motive does appear to be that it was an act of people who believe in the value of broad-based political terror.

Starovoitova's murder is only the latest in a string of recent assassinations that prompted one journalist to call St Petersburg "the centre of political terror in Russia".

The notion that the struggle between honesty and dishonesty, rather than between left and right, may be at the root of the St Petersburg evil is strengthened by the high number of candidates with criminal convictions running in elections for the local council in St Petersburg, scheduled for December 6. Starovoitova was leader of a group of democrats called Northern Capital running in many wards across the city.

One thing is sure: none of Starovoitova's allies trusts the investigators. There is a firm belief that an unbroken chain of acquaintances and friends stretches from the depths of the underworld through the law enforcement agencies to the very heights of power. The onus is on the enforcers, who have yet to solve a single high profile killing.

Alexeyev said that the officer in charge of the case was Victor Cherkessov, who had "spent his Soviet career persecuting dissidents".

"If Cherkessov's been brought into the case," said Alexeyev, "You can consider it buried."

The Week

BOB Livingston, a 55-year-old conservative technocrat from Louisiana, was unanimously endorsed by congressional Republicans to succeed Newt Gingrich as Speaker of the House of Representatives.

KENNETH Starr's legal ethics adviser, Sam Dash, quit in protest at the independent counsel's decision to give evidence to the impeachment inquiry against President Clinton.
Washington Diary, page 6

JACK Kevorkian, the American physician known as Dr Death, is challenging the police to arrest him after a television programme showed him giving fatal injections to a terminally ill patient who was then seen dying on camera.

THE battle for control of France's far right National Front was thrown open when an appeal court confirmed Jean-Marie Le Pen's disqualification from holding public office because of violence during last year's general election campaign.

HEATHER Hill, the only candidate from Australia's rightwing One Nation party to win a seat in the recent election could be prevented from entering parliament if she is found not to have fully renounced British citizenship.

THE trial of one of the world's worst serial killers began this week in Ukraine, when Anatoly Onoprienko pleaded guilty to murdering 52 people, including children.

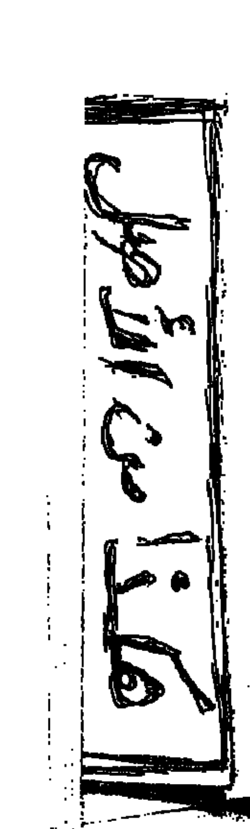
SUSAN McDougal, the Whitewater figure who spent 18 months in prison for refusing to testify against Bill Clinton, was acquitted on nine embezzlement and tax charges. The verdict is likely to be interpreted as another sign of public rejection of over-zealous prosecution.

MIREYA Perez, a member of Chile's *carabineros* whose main experience is overseeing the care of abused children and battered women, has been appointed the country's first female general.

MEXICO'S Zapatista rebels walked out of a meeting with state legislators in Chiapas, accusing them of having a "racist" attitude.

JACQUES Medecin, known as Le Grand Jaquou during his 24 years reign as mayor of Nice, died aged 70 in Uruguay. He served a jail sentence for corruption before leaving the Riviera resort for South America.

THE veteran film director, Alan Pakula, aged 70, whose films included Klute and All The President's Men, died in a car crash.



Jakarta mob hacks Christians to death

John Aglionby in Jakarta

THOUSANDS of Muslims ran amok in the Indonesian capital Jakarta last weekend, hacking at least seven Christians to death and injuring scores more as deep-seated animosities erupted into more than eight hours of street violence.

A week after 18 people were killed in the city in several days of political unrest, north and west Jakarta again reverberated to the sounds of gunfire, tear gas and burning buildings as mobs of Javanese Muslims rampaged through the streets to destroy all Christian symbols.

At least 11 churches were attacked. One was razed to the ground, three badly burnt, three others seriously damaged and the rest had windows smashed and doors beaten in.

The hysterical rioters then turned their fury on Christian neighbourhoods, stoning and burning houses and shops all afternoon until brought to their senses by the dusk call to prayer.

"We are Islamic gentlemen and they are Christian pigs," one young man said between throwing stones into a barricaded Christian alley.

Most of the anger was directed towards the community from Ambon, a Christian island 2,800km east of Jakarta. It was sparked by rumours that Ambonese who had been gambling last Saturday burned three Jakarta mosques during pre-dawn prayers. The reality was that a few stones were thrown at one mosque.

The retaliation began with an attack on the nearest church to the vandalised mosque. Hundreds of people, many claiming to be from a group called the Front to Defend Islam (PFI), first threw stones at the Protestant church and then stormed the building, quickly setting it alight.

Those inside fled out the back but three people were caught by the mob and hacked to death. The bodies were then jumped upon and beaten with sticks. An ear was cut from one body and paraded triumphantly around the street.

News of the carnage quickly spread to other churches, which were evacuated. "There were about 30 of us in the building when we heard what was happening," said the Rev Andrias Kambuno, vicar at a church about 3km from the scene of the first assault. "We got everyone out and locked all the doors." Five minutes later it was attacked.

The congregation of another church barricaded the building well enough to prevent the mob entering, so the rioters set fire to buildings on either side in an attempt to burn the church.

Hundreds of troops and riot police were deployed to the area but they, too, were set upon.

Most of the violence occurred in the city's Chinatown but the Chinese were not singled out. "This is more of a religious-ethnic issue," said Solaiman Chandra as he guarded a church. "But there is also an economic aspect. People are fed up with being poor and it is clear they wanted to vent their frustration."



Muslim rioters toss debris on to a car they had set alight during ethnic and religious rampage in Jakarta

Somalia faces threat of new famine

David Gough in Xuddur

THE threat of famine hangs over war-torn southern Somalia, for the second time in six years. The United Nations World Food Programme says as many as 300,000 people are at imminent risk of starvation.

Edward Kallon, the WFP's programme co-ordinator for Somalia, said: "The situation is critical and WFP has no option but to divert all available resources to saving lives in Bay and Bakool."

Mr Kallon added that if the international community did not act immediately, there would be severe famine in the area early next year.

Bay and Bakool, the traditional breadbasket districts of Somalia, are worst hit, with food shortages brought on by a civil war that has displaced a large number of people. Floods early in the year and the failure of recent rains have combined to worsen the crisis.

This area was worst hit by the famine of 1991-2 which killed 350,000 people. Operation Restore Hope, a military intervention led by the United States, was designed to ensure safe distribution of food aid, but ended in expensive failure.

Since 1991, when the dictator Mohammed Siad Barre was forced to flee the country, Somalia has been without a central government and is ruled by militias who fight each other for regional control.

Like the famine in southern Sudan, Somalia's food shortages are mostly man-made. "We are very worried by the parallels that we are seeing with . . . southern Sudan this time last year, as well as the Somali famine of 1992," said Brenda Barton, an information officer with the WFP.

John Ryle, page 14



Rail strikes bring chaos to roads across Europe

Paul Webster in Paris

RAIL traffic ground to a halt across the Continent on Monday as rail workers began strikes against European Union plans to open the freight market to competition.

Strikes stranded passengers and goods in Belgium and severely disrupted rail traffic in France, Greece and Luxembourg.

In Britain, Austria, Germany and the Netherlands rail workers expressed opposition to the plans, but through leaflets, news conferences and letters to transport ministers rather than industrial action, unions said.

The strike action threatened to be most serious in France, where railway workers called for an indefinite strike to start this weekend. A one-day stoppage severely affected French traffic on Monday.

Exceptions included the Eurostar shuttle between London and Paris, which was running normally. Eurostar trains to Brussels were severely disrupted.

The strike call in France added to growing dissension in the leftwing coalition government and among its supporters.

The Socialist prime minister, Lionel Jospin, whose popularity has slid in polls for the first time since his appointment 17 months ago, appealed to government partners to stop quarrelling. He faces allegations that his key policies, including those on welfare reform, immigration and privatisation, are derived from those of Alain Juppé.

Mr Juppé, the former Gaullist prime minister, led the right to defeat in June 1997. Communists and Greens in the coalition have created a similarly hostility to Mr Jospin in the run-up to European elections next June.

They have been joined by the Socialist party left wing, a quarter of the executive. Marie-Noelle Lienemann last weekend accused Mr Jospin of restricting party democracy, while another leftwinger, Julian Dray, said he had embarked on a programme of "creeping privatisation" — a reference to sell-offs in telecommunications, banks and air transport.

Six French rail unions joined the action over EU deregulation plans and have called out workers for at least 48 hours from Friday to back shorter hours and better conditions in France. Protests are planned by hospital, post office, telecommunications and job centre workers.

EU unions see deregulation plans drawn up by the European transport commissioner, Neil Kinnock, as another form of privatisation.

Mr Kinnock told EU transport ministers on Monday that only 14 per cent of European freight was carried by rail because of competition from road hauliers, and that there might be no rail traffic at all by 2012 unless restrictions on state rail operators were removed.

Ailing Yeltsin meets Jiang

James Meek in Moscow

DOUBTS about whether Boris Yeltsin will be able to cling to office until his retirement in 2000 intensified this week as it was revealed that the Russian president had been admitted to hospital with pneumonia.

Fighting to show he could still be head of state, Mr Yeltsin, aged 67, refused to cancel a meeting with the Chinese president, Jiang Zemin, inviting him into his room in Moscow's Central Clinical Hospital, where he was admitted on Sunday.

Russian television showed almost surreal silent footage of the leader of the world's largest country and the leader of the world's most populous sitting opposite each other. Mr Yeltsin made characteristic extravagant arm gestures but it was impossible to tell what he was saying.

This show of life may not save him from the ignominy of forced retirement if sufficient political pressure builds up to persuade his immediate circle, in particular his family, to tell him he must step down for health reasons.

The most likely successor would be the prime minister, Yevgeny Primakov. Constitutionally, he is already Mr Yeltsin's stand-in, and has in many respects become Russia's leader.

In the past, Mr Yeltsin's ailments caused stock markets to tremble. Since the collapse of the rouble and Mr Primakov's rise, the situation has changed. On Monday Moscow's stock market soared.

Washington Post, page 18

Argentina confronts links with Nazis

Uki Goni in Buenos Aires

ARGENTINA is slowly drawing aside the veil on the refuge granted by its late president, Juan Perón, and his wife Evita to fugitives of Hitler's Third Reich during the late 1940s and early 1950s, when the country became a haven for Nazi Germany's war criminals.

Historians from all over the world who make up the government's Commission for the Clarification of Nazi Activities in Argentina (Ceana) are conferring in Buenos Aires and will make public their first report on their investigations this week.

At issue is Argentina's "neutrality" during the second world war and the possible connivance between Argentina, the Vatican and the Allies to hide a reserve of anti-communist Nazis in Latin America.

"This is a painful process for us," the Peronist foreign minister, Guido Di Tella. But splits are already opening up within the commission.

"If this is going to be the official version then it's unacceptable," said Shimon Samuels, vice-president of the Nazi-hunting organisation, the Simon Wiesenthal Centre.

Critics are disappointed by the figure Ceana puts on Nazi war criminals in Argentina. The commission says only 150 war criminals entered Argentina, not "thousands" as some have estimated.

In recent years Argentina has granted extradition requests. In 1996, it extradited Erich Priebke, who participated in the shooting of 335 Italians in 1944. Last week Italy's appeal court confirmed his sentence of life imprisonment.

Nigeria beggared by lootocracy

Cameron Duodu

FIVE months after the death of Nigeria's military dictator, General Sani Abacha, the amount of money revealed to have been stolen by him and his family has become so staggering that his name now stinks more richly even than that of Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo).

Mobutu hid his stolen wealth in secret bank accounts abroad, but the Abacha family preferred ready cash. According to the government that took over from him on June 8, no less than $750 million in foreign currency has been retrieved from the family.

As a result, Abacha is being commemorated in songs of abuse, written specially for him. One goes: "Abacha, Sani Abacha! A-butcher of Abuja! Alive, you were a kleptocrat. Dead, you've turned a lootocrat! No wonder Kama Sutra, Snuffed out your stinking aura."

The reference to the Kama Sutra alludes to reports that Abacha met his end during an overzealous tryst with two courtesans, and that he had imported Viagra pills for the occasion.

His wife Maryam was more interested in money. A few weeks after his death, she was stopped at Kano airport trying to leave for Saudi Arabia "to rest" after the ordeal of her husband's funeral. She was travelling with 38 suitcases.

As a Muslim woman, she would have been expected to go into purdah when she arrived in Saudi Arabia. So the amount of luggage she was carrying for such an austere rite aroused suspicion. The suitcases were seized and found to be full of foreign currency.

One of Abacha's sons was also caught with about $100 million on him. During his father's rule, he drove two differently coloured Ferraris despite the traffic jams in Lagos and most Nigerian cities.

A further two to three billion dollars are estimated to be in the hands of Abacha's foreign frontmen. Abacha made use of the services of Lebanese merchants, particularly the Chagoury brothers, for his overseas financial operations.

The Washington Post reported on November 22 last year that Gilbert Chagoury made "a contribution of $460,000" to Vote Now 96, an organisation closely associated with the Democratic National Committee in the United States. As a result, Chagoury was able to "attend a White House holiday dinner with President Clinton" in 1997 for 250 top Democratic National Committee donors, although Chagoury was "not a party contributor and could not legally give to the Democrats".

Mallam Mohammed Haruna, chief press officer for the new head of state, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, told reporters in Abuja that full-scale investigations are going ahead to try to locate any of Abacha's money hidden abroad.

His greed has added a word to the African political dictionary — lootocracy. Abacha deliberately starved Nigeria's two oil refineries of the funds they needed to stay operational. As a result — and even though it is one of the world's most important oil-producing countries — Nigeria regularly ran short of petrol. Abacha would wait for riots at petrol stations, then give licences to his business cronies to import refined fuel into the country. They could charge whatever they liked because of the "short notice" they had been given.

The recovery of the $750 million from the Abacha family was made possible by the squealing of Abacha's former security adviser, Ishmael Gwarzo. Gwarzo himself also handed over $250 million, which he had withdrawn a few days before Abacha died.

The money was to have been taken to a conference of the Organisation of African Unity, to be distributed to African heads of state whom Abacha wanted to influence.

Newspaper reports in Nigeria have forced Ghana's president, Jerry Rawlings, to deny that Abacha gave him $5 million through Gwarzo in November 1996, an election year.

Abacha wanted him to win so that he could continue to oppose Nigeria's expulsion from the Commonwealth after Abacha's brutal execution of the Ogoni writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni environmental activists.

Another West African president whose electioneering was bankrolled by Abacha is said to be President Matthieu Kerekou of Benin.

In providing information to the new authorities, Gwarzo is trying to protect himself, for he, too, is no novice in the lootocratic stakes. Gen Abubakar's chief press officer says Gwarzo owns 28 choice properties in the federal capital, Abuja. He is under house arrest. — *The Observer*



Women beg on Sani Abacha Way in Kano PHOTO: DAVID GUTTENFELDER

Russian voice of reason

OBITUARY
Galina Starovoitova

GALINA Starovoitova, who died aged 52 in a burst of automatic gunfire outside her flat in St Petersburg last week, is the latest Russian politician to fall victim to assassins. But unlike many others, Starovoitova was a long way from the crime-tinged end of the political spectrum. A co-chair of the reformist Democratic Russia party, she was a liberal politician who championed unpopular causes.

While the Duma, the lower house of the Russian parliament, to which she was most recently elected in 1995, became steadily more nationalist and hardline, Starovoitova remained an advocate of policies born of tolerance and respect for individual rights, challenging such bigots as Vladimir Zhirinovsky and denouncing the anti-Semitism that has become common currency among some communists and nationalists.



Starovoitova: Championed those she thought had got a raw deal

She became widely known in the later Soviet period as a champion of those she considered to have had a raw deal, especially the Armenians, then fighting to gain sovereignty from Azerbaijan.

In the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave, the majority Armenian population had sought self-rule and was facing the threat of forced expulsion in retaliation. Starovoitova travelled to the region with the human rights campaigner Andrei Sakharov, with whom she would later work closely in parliament. "I think that a nation's right to self-determination is more important than the idea of state sovereignty," she declared, to the fury of the Azerbaijanis.

Born in the Urals city of Chelyabinsk to a Belorussian father and a Russian mother, Starovoitova graduated from the Leningrad College of Military Engineering in 1966, took an MA in social psychology from Leningrad University in 1971, and in 1980 gained a doctorate in social anthropology from the Institute of Ethnography at the USSR Academy of Sciences, where she worked for 17 years. Her doctoral thesis, published in 1987, was a study of the Tatars of Leningrad. She also published books on anthropology and cross-cultural studies.

When the first semi-free elections took place for the Congress of People's Deputies, Starovoitova was — to her surprise — nominated by an Armenian research institute in an Armenian constituency and elected in 1989. In the new parliament — whose sessions were broadcast live on television — she joined the inter-regional grouping of deputies, a radical force pushing for faster democratisation. She spoke up for parliamentary control over the ministries of defence and of the interior, and the KGB. She was elected to the human rights commission of the Congress.

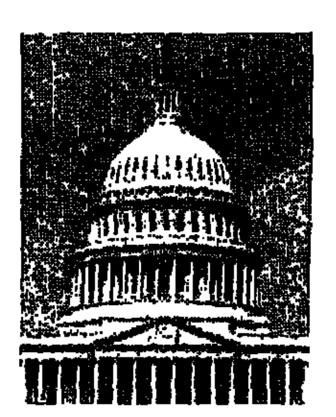
In June 1990, while her term in the Congress was still running, Starovoitova gained election to the Duma in a constituency in Leningrad — not long before the city reverted to its pre-revolutionary name of St Petersburg. The following year she was elected a member of the Democratic Russia leadership.

Felix Corley

Galina Vasilievna Starovoitova, ethnographer and politician, born May 17, 1946; died November 20, 1998

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
November 29 1998

Starr performance in a political farce



Washington diary

Martin Kettle

AT THE end of Kenneth Starr's long day of testimony before the House judiciary committee last week, two notable things happened which failed to make the morning editions of the American papers.

First, the committee chairman Henry Hyde expressed his thanks to the witness. Starr had, after all, been giving evidence since 10am that day, and it was now more than 12 hours later. So he deserved the expression of gratitude extended to him by the chairman. Yet the words that Hyde chose were striking. He said: "Thank you, Judge Starr, for a wonderful day. Thank you."

No sooner had we got over the shock of this glowing statement than another extraordinary thing happened: people in the Rayburn Building committee room began to applaud. Around the seated Starr, they stood and clapped. On the Republican benches to Hyde's right, they also got to their feet, beaming and giving the independent counsel a standing ovation as he rose and departed for his home in Virginia.

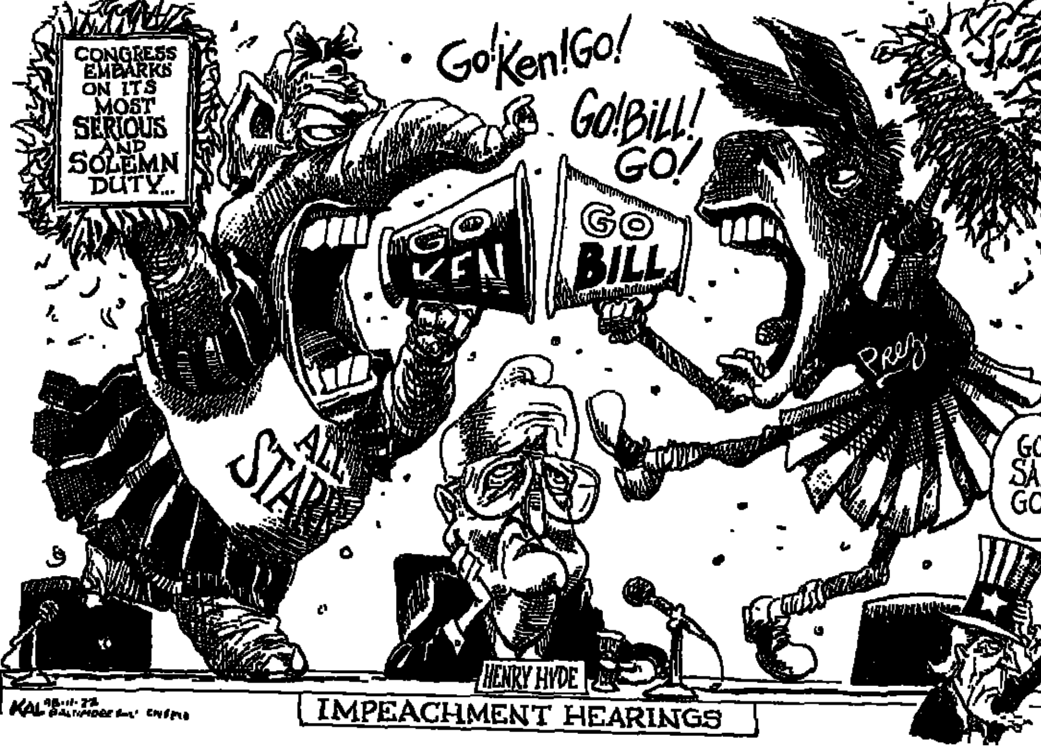
Now it is true that Starr's performance was in some respects prodigious. For most of the morning, he read calmly from his long prepared statement on the impeachment investigation. Then, after a brief break for lunch, he faced questioning from, firstly, the Democrats' lawyer Abbe Lowell and then each of the 37 members of the committee. Pausing for a sandwich in the early evening, he then squared up for an hour to Bill Clinton's lawyer David Kendall, before the day's events concluded with a much easier session involving the Republican counsel David Schippers.

It was easy to forget amid the long hours of testimony and questioning what this occasion was really about — or at least what it purported to be. This was the first day of only the third impeachment inquiry into a United States president in the nation's history. It was, supposedly, a day of solemn seriousness in a process of apparently high constitutional gravity.

In which case, how could this have been appropriately described as a *wonderful* day? And what did the standing ovation tell us, bearing in mind that it was given to a man whose job was to find the facts and report to Congress, but who has interpreted that job — as, it appears, he is entitled to do — as an invitation to construct a prosecution case which downplays unfavourable evidence and which generally conceals the motives and actions of some of the case's most important witnesses?

Such dangers were inherent in Starr's acceptance of the invitation to give evidence last week. Almost inevitably, they placed him in the position of becoming party to the impeachment drive. Constitutionally, he was not supposed to do that, as his ethics adviser, Professor Sam Dash, argued in his powerful letter of resignation, delivered the following morning.

"You have no right or authority under the law, as independent counsel, to advocate for a particular position on the evidence before the judiciary committee or to argue that the evidence in your referral is strong enough to justify a decision by the committee to recommend impeachment," Dash wrote. But Starr eschewed such caution, pressing his case that Clinton had committed high crimes, for which he should be impeached. That was why Dash resigned — and why the Republicans cheered.



Those cheers alone imply that the constitutional tension has gone out of this inquiry. Yet there is plenty of other evidence — most of it in the words and behaviour of politicians of both parties, Clinton included, since the mid-term elections. It all points the same way.

Hyde's words, and the standing ovation for Starr, appear to give the final lie to the impeachment inquiry as a serious constitutional process. These were the words and actions of men and women who have ceased to pretend. Deep down, they know that they are now in some way going through the motions.

As a result, the Republicans have stopped concentrating, and have allowed themselves to behave in ways which they would have avoided only a few weeks ago. So, too, it should be noted, have the Democrats. Who now remembers those anguished remarks which so many Democratic members of Congress made, less than two months ago, about Clinton's behaviour? Or those tense September gatherings when ashen-faced Democrats came down to the White House from Capitol Hill to demand penance from the president?

In part, this fatalism can be put down to the November 3 election results in which "the American people" are widely deemed to have given their verdict against the process. Certainly that is the view, not just of the president, but also of the man now certain to become the next Speaker of the House, Congressman Bob Livingston of Louisiana, who was unanimously nominated by his party last week. Livingston does not want to inherit an unpopular impeachment inquiry when he formally succeeds Newt Gingrich on January 6. And that, in a nutshell, is that.

The election results are not, however, the only reason for such displays of sectarian feeling. Among Clinton's recidivist Republican critics, it has now become fashionable to say that this whole question is too important to be decided by opinion polls. Starr himself said as much towards the end of his presentation last week. And, in a sense, these protestations are right. Let's give credit where credit is due. These people are not easily swayed. They have been out to get Clinton for years.

This determination to impeach creates problems for Livingston rather than Clinton. It means that there is no tidy exit strategy for the Republicans. Or, rather, it suggests that the Republican leadership is prepared to see the impeachment effort die on the floor of the House, defeated by the Democrats and a decisive group of defecting Republicans, mainly from the Northeast.

All this is part tragedy and part farce. But what we are witnessing in Washington is also dangerous because it is driving the already debased political process of the US still further into disrepute.

Of all the crimes that politicians can commit, this is truly the most unforgivable.

Washington Post, page 17

EU accounts add up to a bureaucratic mess

EUROPE THIS WEEK
Martin Walker

STRASBOURG: An annual ritual at this time of year is the European Court of Auditors' report into the waste and incompetence displayed by the European Union in the way it spent its annual $90 billion budget. This year was no exception, but then this year was not all that it seemed.

To begin with the horror stories: the $900 million earmarked by the EU for repairing and making safe the nuclear power plants of the old Soviet bloc has been either wasted, lost, defrauded or left unspent. "It is particularly worrying that, at the end of 1997, it was not possible to judge whether there had been any actual progress in terms of nuclear safety," Bernhard Friedmann, president of the Court of Auditors, told the European parliament.

The nuclear scandal was simply the most chilling of a series of accounting disasters and bungles afflicting every aspect of Europe's finances. It was also the most shaming, because the EU sought and won the agreement of the Group of Seven leading industrial nations to manage the international community's rescue effort for the 65 sick and dangerous Soviet nuclear power plants. Trusted by its allies and Russians alike, the EU bungled the job.

This year's report by the auditors was a bombshell, because it did not list the usual dreary and often piddling amounts of fraud, which amount to a few million dollars. Instead, it focused on the mismanagement, bungling and botched accounting which totals more than $16 billion:

- The catalogue of financial disasters unveiled began with the EU's 15 member states, whose own tax collection systems were so poor that they failed to collect $80 billion of value added tax (VAT) — almost enough to finance the entire EU budget;
- The court went on to list a series of administrative and accounting bungles by the Commission itself, starting with "an understatement of the commitments of the year [1997] by almost 800 million ecu [$920 million] and the understatement of off-balance sheet commitments by about 4,000 million ecu";
- The Commission was told that it cannot keep track of its funds: "The total value of advances or payments on account registered during the year as budgetary payments is understated by at least 4,126 million ecu";
- Then the Commission was told that it cannot keep reliable books: "The total amount of debtors representing amounts owed by the member states to the Community institutions and disclosed in the consolidated balance sheet as 1,756.6 million ecu is not accurately reflected in the accounts";
- And the Commission often doesn't know what it has spent. "Bank account balances of the Community are not accurately reflected in the balance sheet because amounts held in certain third countries to a value of several hundred million ecu have been recorded as budget payments instead of assets. For the Phare programme alone [eastern Europe] the amount was at least 370 million ecu".

MEPs listened aghast as the full scale of the accounting mess was laid out before them by Europe's own expert auditors, who had to state that "the incidence of errors affecting the transactions underlying the Commission's payments is so high that the Court has had to give an adverse opinion on legality and regularity". This was a polite, accountant's way of saying that if the EU were a company, its directors would either be bankrupt or in jail by now.

The only kind words for the Commission came from the British Labour MEP, Terry Wynn from Merseyside, who said, "At least budget commissioner Erkki Liikanen is genuinely trying to clean all this up, and reforms he has set in motion should improve matters."

Commissioner Liikanen looked on the bright side, noting that "the majority of both formal and substantial errors occurred in the agricultural and structural programmes, of which more than 80 per cent are managed by the member states". So it wasn't all down to him. Where it was, the commissioner promised reforms, transparency and simplified procedures.

Behind all this lies a political intrigue. Bernhard Friedmann, the court president, is a German Christian Democrat, whose MEPs voted immediately after the report's publication to withhold approval of the Commission's budget, and to threaten a no-confidence vote in the Commission. This would have the effect of barring the 20 commissioners from ever holding European office again.

There is much support for this move in parliament, partly because of this year's catalogue of fraud and bungling, but also because the constitutional struggle for power between the Commission and an increasingly assertive parliament is coming to a head.

The blame should mostly lie with bureaucracies of the member states, which actually distribute the money. Commission proposals to improve its own cash management systems are being blocked by national governments, which do not want to give Commission auditors too much power to probe what they do with Europe's money.

Finally, parliament is looking for an excuse to show the Commission who is boss, and now reckon they have found one. Interestingly, Liikanen is challenging Friedmann to a public debate on the charges raised by the report. So far, the auditor in chief has not risen to the commissioner's bait.

The biggest study into the effects of tobacco has found that smoking-related diseases will eventually kill one in three Chinese men, writes **Sarah Boseley**

Selling death to the Chinese

A THIRD of all the young men in China will eventually die of smoking-related diseases, scientists said last week, describing what they called the catastrophic results of an epidemic sweeping the country.

The results of the biggest study into the effects of tobacco, by British, Chinese and American scientists, suggest that cigarettes will kill 100 million Chinese men who are now aged under 29. Half of them will die in middle age.

The results of two studies, one looking at 1 million deaths that have already occurred and the other at future trends, were released last week in Beijing and London and published in the British Medical Journal.

To reverse the slide into tobacco-related death and disease will require a huge amount of public education. A recent study showed that two-thirds of Chinese thought cigarettes caused no harm or very little harm. The chances of changing attitudes fast are not good. "It will take the Chinese government some years before the figures become as real to them as they are to the British government," said Richard Peto, the Oxford university epidemiologist who was one of the study authors.

China in the 1990s is at the same stage in its tobacco epidemic as the United States was in the 1950s, and appears to be following a similar pattern. Average daily consumption in the US rose from one in 1910 to four in 1930 to 10 in 1950, where it stabilised for 30 years, until the dangers started to be fully appreciated.

Just as is now predicted for China, deaths from smoking-related diseases went up from 12 per cent in the 1950s to 33 per cent in the 1990s.

This "catastrophic epidemic" was home-grown in its beginnings, Professor Peto said. "Mao Zedong's slogan was 'food, shelter and cigarettes for everybody'." Western tobacco companies are trying hard to get into the market, but at the moment they have only a 10 per cent share.

Alan Lopez, acting chief of the World Health Organisation's epidemiology and burden of disease unit, said a law banning cigarette advertising on radio and television was not always strictly observed. "Formula One has asked for special permission," he said, "and the government said OK. As of next March, television screens will be filled with cigarette advertising running around race tracks."

Dr Lopez said 1 million Chinese a year were expected to die by 2005, 2 million a year by 2025, and 3 million a year by 2050 if people continued to smoke as they were now.

The damage done is worst in those who start young, and two-thirds of Chinese men begin smoking under the age of 25. Dr Lopez said cessation rates in the country were extremely low. Preventing children from starting was not enough, because it would not stop the deaths of those smoking now.

The one bright spot, Professor Peto said, was that smoking among women appeared to have decreased. Many were dying as a result of 10 per cent of women taking it up in 1950, but now only 1 per cent of women became smokers.

Researchers from the Chinese Academy of Preventive Medicine, the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, Oxford university and Cornell university in the US carried out the study, which is unique in focusing on the effect of tobacco on an entire developing nation. Interviews with the families of 1 million people who died were carried out by more than 500 fieldworkers.

The study sought out a quarter of a million men over the age of 40, who were interviewed and medically tested and who will be monitored for decades, tracing the development of the epidemic.

Scientists were surprised to find that the diseases induced by tobacco were not exactly the same as those that kill in Britain, where lung cancer and heart attacks are most common. Only 15 per cent died of lung cancer in China, while 45 per cent died from chronic lung disease and 5 to 8 per cent of each of oesophageal cancer, stomach cancer, liver cancer, stroke, heart disease and tuberculosis. It appears that smoking in China increases those diseases that are already common.

Tessa Jowell, Britain's Minister for Public Health, said the figures "graphically illustrate the disastrous consequences of smoking".

Clive Bates, of Action on Smoking and Health, accused British American Tobacco of trying to keep the Chinese in ignorance of the risks of smoking. The job description for a medical post in China that BAT sought to fill two years ago stated that responsibilities included "portraying the company view on smoking and health to key audiences in China".



Card players in Beijing, gambling with cigarettes PHOTO: HIE...

Le Monde, page 22

The count

Cigarette consumption in China: 1950s, 100 billion; 195? 500 billion; Now, 1,800 billion
Tobacco-related deaths, 199? 600,000; 12 per cent of male deaths; 3 per cent of female dea...
Expected deaths per year: 800,000 in 2000; 1 million in 201? 2 million in 2025; 3 million in 205?

India's Christians under siege

Suzanne Goldenberg
on a worrying wave of religious violence in India

AT 2.30 in the morning, beneath a steady drizzle, two dozen men, wild on drink and the anticipation of violence, walked over the grassy hills to a house, a few miles from the village of Navapada. They pounded on the door and demanded medicine for an ailing child. Inside were four terrified nuns. They asked to see the child, and climbed to the roof for a look. They saw a mob armed with crossbows, knives and iron rods. The nuns locked themselves in their makeshift chapel, knelt before the picture of Jesus and prayed. For the next two hours, they listened as the men rampaged through the house. But the nuns had no telephone, and the night watchmen had fled, so they opened the door.

"They joined hands and said: 'We are your sisters. We are serving God. Please don't do anything to us'," says Sister Marina, who reached Navapada after dawn. "They said: 'You are not our sisters, you are our wives'. So outside on the grass, they took them. One sister was used by seven, eight people, one sister was used by five people, two sisters were used by two."

In India, where legend dates the advent of Christianity to 52 AD, and a convent education is seen as a sign of good breeding, the gang rape of the nuns caused a collective gasp of shock. But it was not, as the authorities claim, an isolated incident.



A priest surveys his demolished church PHOTOGRAPH: T NARAYAN/OUTLOOK

Since last March when the coalition led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party came to power, the Catholic and Protestant churches have recorded about 40 instances of violence or harassment of Christian institutions or personnel, including: the desecration of a convent at Baghpat, the burning of Bibles at a Protestant school at Rajkot, the digging up of a newly buried man in a Methodist cemetery, and the razing of a Catholic church at Naroda.

At least 27 attacks are known to have taken place in the state of Gujarat, about an hour's drive from the spot where the nuns were raped. Gujarat is a stronghold of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council), which advocates an even more extreme, anti-Western and anti-modern creed than the BJP. Both organisations and the VHP youth wing, the Bajrang Dal, are the spawn of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the fascist organisation which indoctrinated the murderers of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948.

All describe Christianity and Islam — the usual target of the Hindu chauvinists — as alien. "The church is foreign," says Dr Praveen Togadia, Gujarat general secretary of the VHP. "It is controlled by the Pope. All churches in India are controlled by extra-territorial authorities." In the latest recorded incident, on the night of October 29, the Bajrang Dal descended on a Pentecostal convention in the city of Baroda, hauled the sleeping delegates into the street and beat them up. The police stood by.

The authorities in Gujarat are equally unconcerned about the violence. In Gandhinagar, the state capital, bureaucrats in the BJP state government affect surprise at the nervousness that has befallen the Christian community. "Oh dear," said PG Ramrakhiani, the state's home secretary. "The Catholics think they are going to die." Like the junior bureaucrats of Jhabua, Ramrakhiani claims the events on his turf were all isolated incidents — or can be explained away as old disputes over land, and caste tension, in which religion is incidental.

Despite a letter of censure from the National Minorities Commission, which visited Gujarat in August, Ramrakhiani will concede only one minor anti-Christian incident, and bridles at the suggestion that the BJP authorities are unconcerned at the hate campaign against Christians being conducted by their allies in the VHP.

Dr Togadia of the VHP claims that Christian schools — even those with a majority of Hindu pupils — are engaged in a secret project of conversion. "Academic institutions are a means to the end for collecting the faithful," he says. "All teaching in India is a means to an end to proselytise and evangeli-

Such accusations are prepo- ous, given the census figures and laws that require would-be con- to be over 21 and to get a certi- from local bureaucrats.

Most of the attacks on the Ch- have been in the eastern half of Gujarat where the Adivasis — the or- nal tribal inhabitants of India — and some argue that it is th- efforts here that have made Christian churches a target. No- the VHP claims, for telling pe- they have the secret for salva- but for their efforts to improve t- lot of the Adivasis by runn- schools, clinics and dairy co-op- tives. They are an obstacle to t- "moneylenders and the merch- and the other people who come the jungle areas to exploit the Ad- sis," says Father Berecïartua, a lo- priest.

But obstacles can be removed the congregation of St Mar- church at Naroda, an industri- sprawl outside the city of Ahme- abad, discovered. Last April, w- local Catholics watched and w- men armed with iron bars and d- ving tractors demolished a chu- that was yet to be consecra- smashed statues, and stole chu- vestments. Then they took th- money from the collection box a- bought ice cream.

The men were from the lo- council, which is controlled by the BJP. Council president Shambubh- Bharwad, who ordered the dem- tion, says the church was in violatio- of town planning bylaws — a fact th- parish priest concedes. "There w- no church," said Bharwad, "only a- illegal construction. In this ar- there is no communal tensio- There is nothing but peace here."

Fear factor lingers as beef export ban set to be lifted

Stephen Bates in Brussels and James Meikle

BRITAIN was this week facing the massive task of restoring foreign consumer confidence in its beef after finally winning the battle to have the 32-month export ban lifted.

The Government, farmers and the meat industry tempered jubilation at winning a crucial vote at a meeting of European Union agriculture ministers by acknowledging how hard it would be to recover overseas markets worth £520 million in 1995, the year before the ban.

A European consumer group warned that confidence in beef remained "shaky", and Tony Blair conceded that winning back trade would take "time and effort". Exports are not expected to start from England, Wales and Scotland until late February or March because production conditions still have to be inspected by EU officials. Sales from Northern Ireland, where the export ban was lifted in June, are still said to be minuscule despite heavy marketing.

The European Commission was this week expected to rubber-stamp the ending of the ban, which has cost the British beef industry more than £4 billion. It will set out the formal steps for lifting the embargo imposed by a 14-1 EU vote in March 1996, a week after the Government admitted a probable link between BSE and new-variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, a fatal condition thought to have killed 30 people since 1995.

Only Germany held out against allowing British exports to resume at Monday's agriculture ministers' meeting. Its diplomats said they accepted the measures Britain had introduced but wanted to be sure they were effective. Luxembourg, Spain, Austria and France abstained.

The UK agriculture minister, Nick Brown, said: "This is clearly good news for our beef industry . . . There may be residual consumer prejudice although that is unfair because our beef is among the safest in the Western world."

Exports from Britain must all be deboned beef from cattle whose own histories and those of their mothers can be clearly traced as free of suspected BSE. There will be strict abattoir checks and, as in Britain, no beef for human consumption can be from cattle older than 30 months. The Government will have to show that a compulsory cull of the remaining 4,700 cattle born since 1996 whose mothers subsequently developed BSE is being carried out.

More than 4 million cattle have been slaughtered because of the BSE crisis, and that number could double by the time Britain is free of the disease.

The decision will increase pressure on the Government to end its domestic ban on beef-on-the-bone imposed last December, a step ministers have said can be taken only if scientific advisers give the all-clear.

Shadow agriculture minister Tim Yeo said: "The Government must now press ahead to get the European agriculture ministers to agree to include beef-on-the-bone in the lifting of the export ban.

"They could immediately strengthen their case in this regard by lifting the domestic ban and in doing so give an immediate vote of confidence in the quality of British beef. Without this it may be hard for the British government to persuade others to buy a product they themselves appear to have so little confidence in."

A recent federation survey of consumer groups in 15 countries found almost unanimous hostility to the ban's lifting, said Joanna Dober, its head of communications.

"There is a pretty strong anti-British sentiment. At every level of society there is a deep-rooted lack of confidence. The belief is that BSE is very prevalent in the UK. There is also a general lack of confidence in the inspection and surveillance measures operating there.

"I don't really see how any marketing campaign can get through the anti-British beef feeling."

Continental farmers, desperate to protect their share of a flooded market, are likely to fuel suspicion by telling consumers to beware claims that Britain had cleaned up its act, she said.

The experience of Northern Ireland, whose tighter safety regulations allowed it resume exporting in June, is grim. Sales remain below 30 tons a month, compared with 1,000 tons before the ban in 1995.

Frans Fischler, the EU agriculture commissioner, said nationalism was another obstacle. "It is clear it is not only a scientific problem. It is a psychological problem and a political problem."

Consumers were more willing to forgive domestic rather than foreign producers after food scares, said Ms Dober. Nationalist appeals to shoppers were more successful when foreign countries urged boycotts of imports, she said.

German consumers were expected to be the most hostile, and Dutch the most forgiving. South American producers, who mostly filled the gap after Britain's withdrawal, are expected to put up a fierce fight to hold market share.

One Northern Ireland meat exporter, Richard Moore, said a whispering campaign had already started, claiming Brussels had lifted the ban solely for political reasons.

The final straw for many farmers was the strong pound, which crippled exports. "That's the killer. Even if Europeans think it's safe, they're not going to pay more for our beef," said Mr Moore.

Tories call for minister to quit

Guardian Reporters

WILLIAM Hague last weekend called on the Prime Minister to sack Geoffrey Robinson, the multi-millionaire Paymaster General, after it emerged that the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) is investigating his business affairs.

The Tory leader claimed that Mr Robinson's position was "completely untenable" because of his determination to shroud his business affairs in secrecy.

Earlier last week Mr Robinson was forced to make a less than convincing 54-second apology to the Commons for failing to declare a string of directorships to Parliament.

The Standards and Privileges Committee demanded that he make the apology after he failed to declare directorships, identified in two reports, in the Register of Members' Interests. He has now been caught out three times in separate reports by Parliament's watchdogs for not declaring his directorships.

Mr Robinson kept his statement to a bare minimum. He told MPs: "No attempt was made by me at any time to use my position in this House to advance any commercial interest. The oversight concerning registration, for which I apologise, is entirely my responsibility."

Details of a fresh complaint were lodged by David Heathcoat-Amory, the shadow chief secretary to the Treasury, to Sir Gordon Downey, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. This involved the failure to declare his ownership of the Indiana-based Roll Center Incorporated — which Mr Robinson admitted he had been a director of from 1988 to 1992.



Geoffrey Robinson: 'Conflict of loyalty' alleged

"Tony Blair said that the Government had to be purer than pure," Mr Hague said. "Does he really think after all this that Geoffrey Robinson is purer than pure? I'm afraid not. It's time for that minister to go."

However, the Tories faced embarrassment themselves when it emerged that Francis Maude, the shadow chancellor, who has led the assault on Mr Robinson, failed to declare an interest as director of a City investment trust before a Commons debate.

No one is suggesting that the 60-year-old Treasury minister has misused Parliament to promote his interests or broken laws to move his millions to tax-free havens. But the feeling among MPs is that he had "a careless and cavalier attitude" to registering them.

UN calls on Britain to prosecute Pinochet

Jamie Wilson and John Mullin

A UNITED Nations panel last week called on the Government to prosecute General Augusto Pinochet under English law if the House of Lords rules that he should not be extradited to Spain.

In a clear and strongly worded recommendation, the UN Committee Against Torture, which periodically reviews the UK's civil liberties record, said that if the Pinochet case was not considered by the Director of Public Prosecutions, Britain could be in violation of international treaties.

The committee, made up of 10 independent legal experts who monitor compliance with the 1984 international convention against torture, issued its recommendation after considering a report presented by the Government.

The House of Lords is expected to rule this week on the High Court decision that the 82-year-old general is entitled to immunity from arrest for offences committed while he was Chile's president. The Spanish authorities are calling for his extradition on charges of genocide, torture, and terrorism.

Under the 1984 Convention Against Torture, to which the UK became a signatory in 1988, a country must "take such measures as may be necessary to establish its jurisdiction" against anybody suspected of carrying out acts of torture.

The Attorney General, John Morris, has already turned down one request to launch a private prosecution against the general. He said that there was "insufficient admissible evidence under English law of an offence", but he has yet to give full reasons.

A spokesman for Amnesty International said that the UN recommendation mirrored the repeated appeals by the human rights group "to respect the principles of international law by trying or extraditing all people suspected of crimes against humanity".

Assessing the UK's overall civil liberties record, the UN panel meeting in Geneva praised the removal of corporal punishment in several overseas dependent territories. The decision to incorporate the European human rights convention was also hailed as a "positive step".

But the committee was concerned by the number of deaths in police custody and the apparent failure of the Government to provide an effective investigative mechanism to deal with allegations of police and prison authorities abuse.

The report also criticised the housing of asylum seekers in prisons. At present there are 300-400 asylum seekers housed in Britain's prisons.

In the past the UN committee has severely criticised the Royal Ulster Constabulary for its policing of Northern Ireland.

Last week the committee welcomed the continuing peace process while calling for a number of reforms, including an end to the use of plastic bullets, the closure of Castlereagh interrogation centre in east Belfast where terrorist suspects are held, and for the RUC to increase its Catholic intake.

http://reports.guardian.co.uk/pinochet

Analysis, page 15

Lords defy European bill for fifth time

Guardian Reporters

THE Government lost its European election bill last week after both sides refused to blink in one of Britain's biggest constitutional confrontations of modern times.

Baroness Jay, the Leader in the Lords, conceded defeat to the Conservatives for this parliamentary session, which ended last week. But she vowed to bring back the bill in the Queen's Speech this week.

She is expected to invoke the rarely used Parliament Act, which gives the Commons primacy over the Lords, to force through the bill.

The contentious item is a provision for Britain's European Parliament elections, to be held under a proportional representation system in which the electorate has to vote for parties rather than individual candidates. In this "closed list" system, the party machine also predetermines the order of candidates on the ballot.

Left hanging in the balance by the defeats is whether June's European election will be held under the existing first-past-the-post system or proportional representation.

The ping-pong battle, in which the Government has been defied and defeated five times by the peers, sets the stage for a fight for survival by the hereditary peers in the new session.

The Government will take swift revenge by introducing in the Queen's Speech its flagship bill to abolish the centuries-old voting rights of hereditary peers.

Baroness Jay told the peers that the election could be held under PR if the bill was on the statute book by mid-January, which would require Conservative co-operation. Officials need that much time to prepare for the June election.

The Conservative leader, William Hague, will be pleased that he was able to demonstrate that the Opposition, after being almost ineffectual since the 1997 general election, has been able to block the Blair juggernaut — even though the Conservatives may suffer if they have to fight the European election under first-past-the-post, where the party's divisions on Europe will be glaringly exposed.

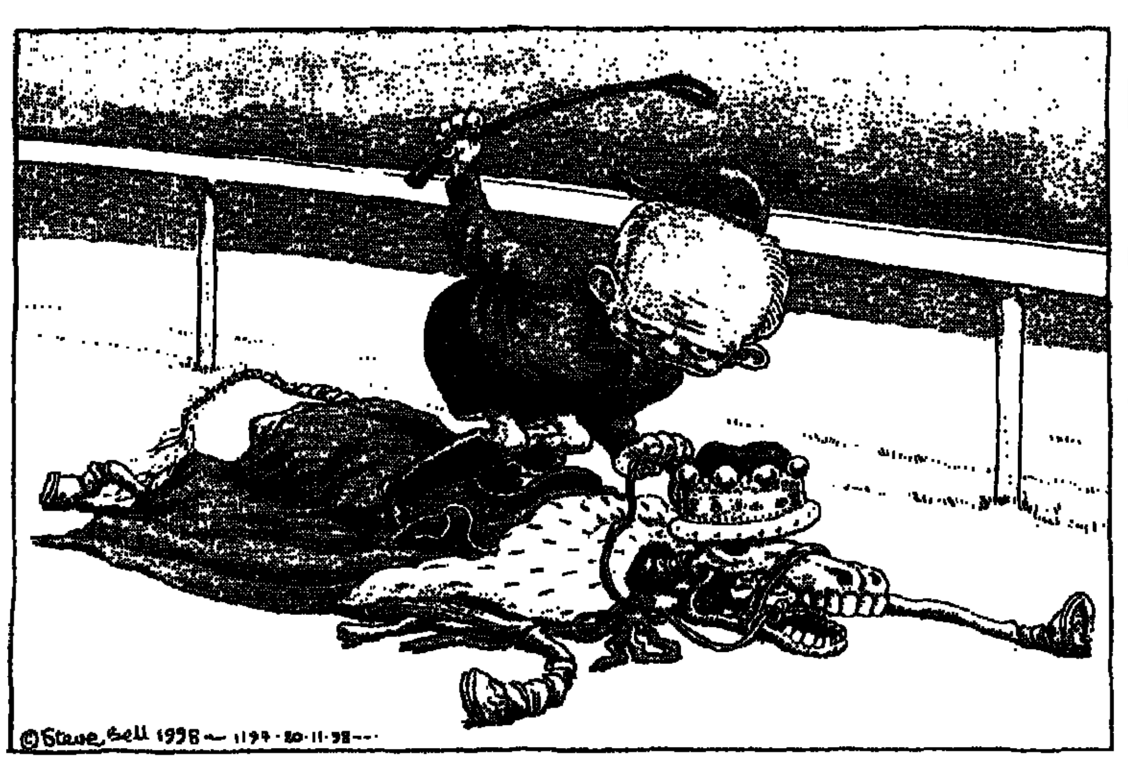
The Conservatives are further promising havoc in the coming year. "It is not just what we could do to the Lords reform bill. It is what we could do to other bills," one senior Tory peer predicted.

Mr Hague presented the issue in terms of Mr Blair using "every constitutional check and balance to expand the power of your own clique of cronies at the expense of the power of the people".

As the 19-month session closed in acrimony, Mr Hague startled some Tory peers by saying he would "not co-operate or acquiesce in any way" with Labour demands for assurances that the Opposition would not block the bill again by insisting on an "open list" ballot paper. Under an open list, voters choose between candidates, rather than between parties under the closed list system.

A combination of Tory peers and cross-benchers voted by 212 to 183 against the bill. Labour estimates that 104 of those who voted against were hereditary peers.

Labour MEPs in Strasbourg broke out the champagne as they realised that many of them might yet survive if the election is held under the first-past-the-post system. Labour is likely to drop to fewer than 40 seats, from 62, if PR is introduced.



Inquiry into IVF link to cancer

Sarah Boseley

A MAJOR study to establish whether women who have fertility treatment are at risk of getting ovarian cancer was announced this week.

Anxieties over a possible link have been voiced for some time, backed by small-scale research in other countries.

Liz Tilberis, the British editor of the US fashion magazine Harper's Bazaar, believes her own ovarian cancer, which nearly killed her, was caused by the powerful drugs used in IVF to stimulate the ovaries into producing eggs. "It is my deeply held belief that my cancer is linked to blasting my ovaries with fertility drugs," she said.

She wrote a biography, entitled No Time To Die, "to highlight the controversy within the scientific community over these drugs — a controversy which suppresses the growing evidence implicating them".

Scientists, backed by the Cancer Research Campaign, will investigate the cases of nearly 3,000 women to try to establish whether IVF drugs pose a cancer risk, and if so how great it is.

Previous studies have suggested that any risk may only become apparent several decades after women have had IVF treatment. The large British study has been made possible only because one London-based endocrinologist (a specialist in glands like the ovaries) has kept extensive records of the 6,000 women she saw over a 30-year career to 1993.

Some 2,700 of Jean Ginsburg's patients, whose progress she monitored for an average of 20 years from the first consultation, have been selected for the study.

Of these, 700 were given the fertility drugs gonadotrophins, which stimulate the ovaries. Just under a third were exposed to much higher levels of the drugs than are used today. The other 2,000 had infertility problems but were not treated with drugs.

Professor Gordon McVie, director general of the Cancer Research Campaign, said: "If there is a link between the treatment and the risk of ovarian cancer, or infertility and the disease, then we may be a step closer to understanding the causes of the disease. If . . . there isn't a link, then it will reassure thousands of women."

Some studies already carried out, mainly in the United States and Australia, have shown a link, but not all have.

But Isabel Dos Santos Silva, from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, said: "There could be something in women that predisposes them to infertility and to ovarian cancer. It could be genetic."

She also said any risk might have to be balanced against the advantages of successful fertility treatment because pregnancy tended to protect women in the long term against ovarian cancer.

Ahern sees Ireland united

Sue Quinn

THE Irish Prime Minister, Bertie Ahern, has forecast there will be a united Ireland within 20 years, fuelling unionists' anxieties on the eve of an historic visit to the republic by Tony Blair.

Mr Ahern, who is due to hold talks with Mr Blair this week on the issue of cross-border bodies, said he believed there would be a united Ireland in his lifetime. "I make no secret of the fact that I would hope in the fullness of time that people will see that it is working together on this island that will make more sense than looking to Westminster, and that they will take a decision to move away from that," he said.

The comments drew an immediate response from unionist leaders, who said Mr Ahern had revealed the real agenda behind the Good Friday agreement. "It's what is written between the lines. Mr Ahern sees he has an agreement in place which is a mechanism to take him to a united Ireland," said Peter Robinson, deputy leader of the Democratic Unionist Party.

Mr Ahern stressed that change could occur only within a climate of peace and with unionist support.

After his talks in Northern Ireland Mr Blair will fly to Dublin where he is expected to become the first British prime minister to address the two houses of the Irish Parliament on Thursday.

There is mounting speculation that Northern Ireland First Minister David Trimble and Mr Ahern are close to agreement on north-south bodies, which will allow policy areas such as food safety, inland waterways, business development and languages to be dealt with on an all-Ireland basis.

Meanwhile the police officer leading the investigation into the Omagh bombing broke down as he mounted a plea to the republican community to help him put behind bars the murderers of 29 people.

Detective Chief Superintendent Eric Anderson asked anyone who suspected somebody of involvement to reflect on the human dimension of the atrocity: "I promise you: you will not be badgered, you will not be harassed . . . I want you to think about this on your own, perhaps even in church on Sunday."

The Real IRA killed 29 people, and left more than 250 injured, when its car bomb exploded in the Co Tyrone market town in August.

Mr Anderson, his voice cracking with emotion, told a news conference in Belfast that he had been devastated by Northern Ireland's worst terrorist atrocity. He had three children, and said that no one could remain detached from it.

"We do try not to show emotion in these things, but I'm afraid, such was the scene of devastation, that it was so harrowing, it is difficult to get away from that."

Police have arrested 42 people. The fact that they had been released without charge did not mean that they had been eliminated from inquiries. He needed the missing pieces to the jigsaw, and asked those in the republican community to examine their consciences.

In Brief

MANJIR Kaur Basuta, a 43-year-old British nanny, is to stand trial in the United States accused of murdering a 13-month-old baby she cared for at her nursery in California.

SIPHO JOZANA, a schizophrenic rap singer who tried to commit suicide in a London police cell, has accepted £100,000 damages from the Metropolitan Police to settle his claim for negligence.

CHANNEL tunnel operators have been told to implement a 24-hour emergency watch after admitting that surveillance teams currently patrol for only 15 per cent of the time, and not at all during the night.

THE drug Tasmar, used by thousands of Parkinson's disease sufferers, has been removed from sale by the European Commission after three patients died taking it.

ABOUT 9.5 million people a year — a sixth of the population — may be infected by food poisoning and other stomach bugs, according to the Food Standards Agency.

ROAD protesters and civil disobedience campaigners will not be the target of police undercover burgling and bugging operations under a revised Home Office code of practice.

GLASGOW city council ruled that a Sioux ghost dance shirt, preserved in a city museum, must be repatriated to South Dakota.

A WOMAN prisoner who was denied a place at Holloway's mother and baby unit, and threatened with separation from her newborn child, won her fight to be allowed to keep the baby with her at Styal prison in Cheshire.

THE Government is to privatise the Commonwealth Institute, guaranteeing the survival of the 30-year-old glass building in west London.

KATE WINSLET, the 23-year-old star of the blockbuster movie Titanic, married Jim Threapleton, an assistant film director, in Reading.

SIR Simon Rattle and 3,503 young perfomers broke the record for the world's biggest symphony orchestra with two performances of Sir Malcolm Arnold's Little Suite No 2.

WOOFIE, a collie-boxer bitch who was condemned to death for barking at a postman, had the court order overturned in Edinburgh. Barbara Cartland and Rolf Harris joined the campaign to save her, and Brigitte Bardot flew in from St Tropez to add her voice to the appeal.

Shayler ruling stuns MI5

Richard Norton-Taylor

THE future of Britain's severe secrecy laws was in doubt last week after a French court rejected the Government's attempt to extradite David Shayler, the MI5 renegade wanted for making a series of allegations about the activities of the security and intelligence services.

In a decision that stunned Whitehall and came as a huge blow to MI5, an appeals court in Paris ordered Mr Shayler's release from prison on the grounds that his arrest had political overtones.

In a ruling which his defence lawyers had not dared anticipate, Judge Elisabeth Ponroy declared that Mr Shayler's whistle-blowing was political in nature, and therefore he could not be extradited to face trial.

After a short hearing, Mr Shayler, who has been locked up in La Santé prison in the French capital since being arrested at the request of Britain on August 1, said: "It is a great day for justice and a sad and embarrassing one for MI5 and the British government."

Hugging his girlfriend, Annie Machon — also a former MI5 officer — he called on the Government to "stop trying to persecute me and instead address the issues that I raise". He said he should not have spent four months in prison "just for criticising MI5".

His arrest in August came a year after he made his allegations about MI5 and MI6 activities through a series of newspaper articles. He was picked up after threatening to make further revelations about the intelligence services — including claims of British involvement in a plot to assassinate the Libyan leader, Colonel Gadafy.

John Wadham, his lawyer and director of Liberty, the civil rights group, said: "Clearly the French court recognised that this was always a politically motivated attempt by the Government to silence one of its critics."

However, government lawyers indicated there were no plans to waive prosecution if Mr Shayler entered Britain and insisted that injunctions preventing British media from publishing any new allegations he may make remained in place.



But in a case which has echoes of the Spycatcher episode a decade ago, Mr Shayler is free to speak at will to foreign publications; and British media would then be free to repeat what they say.

The director of the Freedom of Information Campaign, Maurice Frankel, said he hoped the Government would review the Official Secrets Act. "The French don't regard this as something that would be an offence in France, which is saying something about the official secrets law in this country."

Mr Shayler, aged 32, spent six years in MI5 engaged in some of the most sensitive areas of the agency's work. He joined in 1991, after what he described as scanning the vacancies pages of a national newspaper and coming across an advert which asked: "Waiting for Godot?"

A report written during his schooldays in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, described him as "a born rebel who likes to sail close to the wind . . . and suffers neither fools nor their arguments gladly".

MI5's comments about him are less complimentary. Indeed, they are unprintable.

Comment, page 14

Government cracks down on tax havens to counter scams

Alan Travis

BRITAIN'S offshore tax havens, which shelter more than £350 billion of assets belonging to the world's rich, are to face tough new measures against money laundering and tax evasion.

The move follows a 10-month government inquiry into the financial regulation of the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, which found that the battle against financial crime was "not being convincingly won" by the crown dependencies.

But the investigation by a retired senior Treasury officer, Andrew Edwards, concludes that financial regulation in the islands is "generally good" and criticisms of secrecy, poor regulation and a reluctance to pursue criminals are "wide of the mark".

Now the Government is to press the island authorities to set up specialist financial crime units, to end the so-called "Sark Lark" which masks ownership by using locals as named directors, and to take a battery of other new measures including co-operating fully with other countries in the pursuit of money laundering and financial fraudsters.

But the Home Office inquiry has stopped short of recommending full public disclosure of company audited accounts, arguing that most are just "asset-holding vehicles" rather than trading enterprises, and that many companies would move elsewhere if total disclosure was compulsory.

The Edwards report confirms the existence of offshore banking scams such as the "Sark Lark". It says that the 575 residents of the tiny island of Sark held around 15,000 company directorships, many of them in name only, to mask the true beneficial owners or "shadow directors".

These "Sark Lark" directors meant the companies could ensure secrecy and obtain tax-free status. The Edwards report says the practice is not confined to Sark but exists in all the crown dependencies.

The Home Office minister, Lord Williams, will hold a series of meetings in January with the island authorities to draw up an action plan for putting the new measures into practice.

The island authorities welcomed the Edwards report, arguing that it was a vindication of the high standards of financial regulation already in operation. Peter Ferbrache, of Guernsey's advisory and finance committee, said measures were already in place which ensured the "Sark Lark" was ending.

"The report is a wholesale vindication of the way the financial industry has been regulated over the past 20 years. We think the report is very positive," he said.

Writing on wall for grammar schools

Guardian Reporters

THE last vestiges of selective education face elimination from the state sector after MPs last week approved regulations putting the future of the remaining grammar schools in the hands of local communities.

The Education and Employment Secretary, David Blunkett, will not intervene to influence the outcome of ballots that may now be triggered in the catchment areas of 164 state schools which have gone on selecting the ablest pupils in tests at the age of 11 though the rest of secondary education has become comprehensive.

Mr Blunkett's stance since the policy of local parental choice was outlined by Labour in 1995 has been that education policy should be driven by the needs of the 24,000 schools in the non-selective mainstream and not distracted by arguments over the selective rump.

But the regulations will allow pro-comprehensive campaigners to achieve their objective if they can secure the signatures of 20 per cent of eligible parents on local petitions, to trigger a ballot.

Conservatives and Liberal Democrats attacked the ballot regulations, claiming the proposed referendum process was unfair and unworkable.

Damian Green, the Tory education spokesman, said the question to be posed in referendums was "rigged", since it did not mention grammar schools. Parents would be asked if they were in favour "of all the schools listed introducing admission arrangements which admit children of all abilities".

Mr Green told a committee of MPs studying the regulations: "Clearly what the Government is trying to do here is ask a question where they are trying to push parents into voting yes rather than no."

The schools standards minister, Estelle Morris, said his suggestion was "patronising", and pointed to the rules stating that schools affected would have to be named on ballot papers.

The Government argued that parents would be well aware of the issues at stake during local campaigns that were likely to precede any ballot. It said that the ballot question was approved by the Electoral Reform Society.

Grammar schools have attracted fierce support from the parents of children attending them, partly due to a strong performance in exams reflecting the pupils' ability on entry to the school, as well as the quality of teaching and high aspirations.

But most education authorities, during the past 30 years, switched away from selection as it was unpopular with the majority of parents whose children were excluded from the system, and seen as educationally élitist by most teachers.

The regulations allow two types of local ballots. In areas where more than 25 per cent of secondary places are selective, all parents of schoolchildren will be entitled to vote.

In other areas, the ballot will be restricted to parents in feeder primaries and private prep schools sending five or more children to the grammar school. The Campaign for State Education (Case), a pro-comprehensive lobbying group, said this would disenfranchise many families with a big stake in the outcome of the vote.

Under the new rules, 10 parents will be able to start the procedure to launch a petition. Electoral Reform Ballot Services, a balloting agency chosen by the Government, will estimate the number of signatures required on a petition to trigger the ballot.

Parents have until July to organise the first round of petitions for ballots during the next academic year. Margaret Tulloch, Case spokeswoman, said the issue was not likely to be forced in most areas for another 12 months.

Case has support from the leading trade unions — GMB, Unison, the National Union of Teachers and the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers.

Leading the counter-attack is the National Grammar Schools Association, whose main role is to provide information for parents confused about the technicalities of the ballots, according to chairman Brian Wills-Pope. His organisation has also received representations from most surviving grammar schools.

Men gain in benefit reform, but some widows lose out

Lucy Ward

MORE than a quarter of a million widowed women will lose social security payments — while widowers gain — under plans to reform bereavement benefits.

The Social Security Secretary, Alastair Darling, last week unveiled proposals to modernise widows' benefits, introduced 50 years ago. He wants to target help on bereaved families with children and on the poorest parents. The payments will also ensure men who lose their wives are treated equally with women who lose their husbands.

But the reforms came under attack from the Conservatives. They criticised plans to replace the weekly pension, currently paid to all widows over 45 without dependent children until retirement age, with a new bereavement allowance, worth up to £64.70 a week, paid for only six months. That change will affect 20,000 women in the first year of implementation, rising to 270,000 by 2020. The Tories claimed that scrapping of the benefit, which is funded through National Insurance contributions, represented an assault on the contributory principle and a move towards means testing.

The changes, which will not affect any existing claimants and are not due to come into force until 2001 at the earliest, are ultimately expected to save the Government £500,000 annually — half the current annual widows' benefit bill.

However, the immediate costs of the benefit will rise, partly through a move to double the level of immediate help given to widows and widowers after the death of their spouses from £1,000 to £2,000 to help meet increased funeral costs and unpaid bills.

The extension of the benefit to widowers, which comes in advance of a European Court test case which the Government was expected to lose, will bring help to 15,000 husbands bereaved each year, and will also apply retrospectively to fathers who are already widowed.

Launching the proposals in the Commons, Mr Darling said that the present system was unfair and out-of-date. Parents widowed in future will continue to get an unchanged weekly benefit — currently worth an average of £85 — until their youngest dependent child leaves full-time further education, and the poorest bereaved parents will gain up to an extra £10 a week.



Albert Raynor amid the ancient Three Fields System of communal farming PHOTOGRAPH: KIRAN RIDLEY

Farm sale steps back to medieval times

A RARE opportunity has arisen to step back in time and become a medieval law officer, by buying the tenancy of a small Nottinghamshire farm, *writes Maev Kennedy*.

The farm is on the Laxton estate, a unique survivor of a medieval agricultural system once common in Europe.

Stubbornly refusing to adapt to modern methods, the tenants follow the Three Fields System, whereby the land is held in common in three unfenced fields with two sown annually in rotation and the third left fallow.

Farming is ordained by the Court Leet, a descendant of medieval manorial courts, whose officers are all tenant farmers on the estate.

Albert Rayner, one of the jurors, is now in his 70s and about to retire, so Carter Jonas, land agents for the Crown Estate which owns Laxton, will market the tenancy of his farm.

Mr Rayner's farm is tiny by modern standards, a mere 107 acres, but comes with a house in the village, 59 acres of conventionally farmed land, 48 acres of commonly farmed land and the responsibility to maintain a system of agriculture and law unchanged for 500 years.

"It makes more sense every day, in terms of conserving the richness of the countryside," said Reg Rose, the clerk of the court since 1950.

Social worker killed

David Brindle

A SOCIAL worker was stabbed to death on Monday in an incident at a hostel for people with mental health problems in south London.

Jenny Morrison, aged 51, was pronounced dead on arrival at St George's hospital, Tooting. She had been found with multiple stomach wounds by police officers called to the hostel in Balham.

Police said that a 26-year-old man with a history of mental illness was in custody after being arrested at the scene. Two kitchen knives — both believed to have been used in the attack — were found in an interview room at the hostel, they said.

The incident comes as the Government is poised to unveil a package of measures, and investment of up to £1 billion, to overhaul the provision of care in the community and improve safeguards for care workers and the public. Part of the package will be the opening of more hostels for people with mental illness, offering round-the-clock care and supervision. The fact that Monday's killing took place in such a hostel shows that safety can never be guaranteed.

The president of the Association of Directors of Social Services, Chris Davies, said: "No one should have to pay this price for the work they choose to do.

"The vast majority of people who have our help are no more dangerous than the rest of us, but the staff of social services departments do face threats and encounter violence in the course of the work they do on the community's behalf."

Wandsworth has recently started to make £10 million in social services cuts, but a spokesman said that no savings were being made in mental health services.

Genetic food faces crisis

John Vidal

MONSANTO, the world's leading genetic food company, is facing public meltdown in Britain and Germany with a "society-wide" collapse of support for its radical technologies, according to leaked internal documents.

Amid deepening media problems, and resentment by supermarkets, only senior civil servants and MPs have shown growing support for Monsanto's controversial technologies in the past year.

While many independent polls have shown the British public to be wary of the introduction of genetically modified foods, this is the first internal company analysis to have been made public. Monsanto's latest polls and focus groups show that an earlier collapse of support for GM foods has now accelerated with opposition "skyrocketing", despite a £1 million advertising campaign.

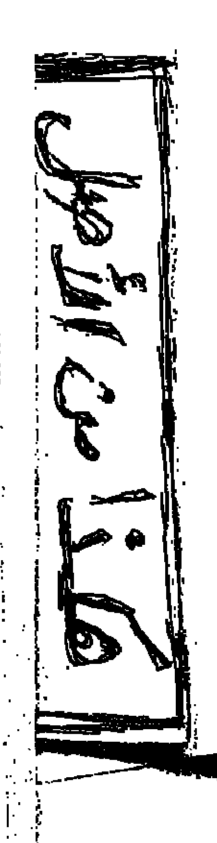
"At each point we keep thinking that we have reached the low point . . . but we apparently have not," writes the author of the papers, Stan Greenberg, a US poll adviser who has worked for President Clinton, Tony Blair and the German chancellor, Gerhard Schröder.

Monsanto's strategy in Britain is shown to have been one of persuading "a socio-economic élite" of the benefits of the technology, so that they would in turn lead others into accepting foods with GM ingredients. The only progress it says it has made in the past year is with the political élite, "upper-level civil servants and MPs".

"Media reporting on biotechnology has been particularly difficult in Britain," says Mr Greenberg, "with key papers and reporters waging a campaign on GM foods."

He recommends the company should prepare for a crisis in Germany, where Monsanto says support for GM foods is lower than anywhere else in Europe.

In a further development, the Ministry of Agriculture in Britain has bowed to pressure from the biotechnology industry and abandoned plans to insist on full-scale crop trials for GM crops.



Schröder breaks nuclear taboo

GERHARD Schröder's coalition has made a welcome decision to pick the nuclear weapons issue as the first area for change in foreign policy. In most democracies the subject has been so demeaned by cheap barbs impugning the loyalty or masculinity of those who question the conventional wisdom that serious debate is nearly impossible. The German government now contains a healthy contingent of Greens who have never hidden their disquiet over nuclear weapons. In their long years in opposition the Social Democrats also had some creative thoughts on defence. In power the two parties want Nato to abandon its refusal to pledge not to be the first to use nuclear weapons. At the United Nations last week, Germany also persuaded Nato's other non-nuclear members not to oppose a vote calling on the nuclear states to remove the warheads from their missiles and thereby cut the risk of accidental launch.

As Nato prepares the new strategic doctrine it will adopt on its 50th anniversary next April, these are valuable moves. During the cold war Nato kept the option of "going nuclear" because the Warsaw Pact had superior conventional forces. Now, against a depleted Russian army, even assuming Nato could again find itself at enmity with Moscow, its rejection of a "No First Use" pledge no longer makes sense. Unless it is based on inertia, today's reluctance has other causes — though they too need to be examined. One is the desire of the United States to make Nato a global instrument operating beyond its European origins and without a UN mandate. The other is the growing tendency to see nuclear weapons as a device against states which use or threaten to use chemical and biological weapons (CBW). The US is developing "earthquake nukes" able to penetrate underground bunkers to destroy CBW laboratories and stocks. Last week's Iraqi crisis was the sort of scenario that could have led to the first use of nuclear weapons since 1945.

It is true that the threshold between biological and nuclear weapons has narrowed. A germ warfare attack on a city could kill half a million people, possibly more than a "tactical" nuclear weapon. But using nuclear weapons is still a psychological leap into a black hole, with one weapon leading to another in a fatal escalation. Keeping nuclear weapons to counter CBW also makes it hard to hold the non-proliferation line. For breaking the taboo on these issues Germany deserves international support.

Another blow to UK secrecy law

DAVID Shayler is not exactly hero material. When he served in the British security services he was hardly appalled by the excessive, intrusive and unwarranted spying it conducted against his fellow British citizens: on the contrary, he often felt that MI5 and MI6 did not go far enough. His grievance against the spooks was not born of conscience so much as frustration; he felt his appetite for derring-do was constrained by boring old red tape. David Shayler does not fit the template of the liberal whistleblower.

Even so, those who care about open government should welcome last week's ruling in a French court, blocking Mr Shayler's extradition to Britain under the Official Secrets Act. That move, which astounded almost everyone involved, could mark a step toward three changes — all of them positive.

First, the French dismissal of Britain's prosecution of Mr Shayler as "politically motivated", coupled with the court's ruling that the Official Secrets Act is political in its nature, should further erode the credibility of that badly outdated and deeply flawed law. As it stands, it is little more than a tool for closed government, enabling Britain's leaders to act in the dark, away from public view. It is a blunt instrument, so comprehensive that it brackets the innermost secrets of national security with anything the spooks deem unfit for the eyes and ears of the citizenry — including members of Parliament. Worse, it fails to distinguish between the different ways in which the law can be broken: a former employee who sells secrets for cash is on a par with the whistleblower driven by conscience to haul secrets into the open. Mr Shayler, who was paid £40,000 by the Mail on Sunday for his story, may well slide between the two categories, but the Official Secrets Act cannot tell the difference. As the French court was only too aware, British law allows no public interest defence.

Now must surely be the time to consign the Act as it currently stands to the dustbin where it belongs. It is the bastard child of a "temporary" law — rushed through a panicked House of Commons in 1911 in just 30 minutes. And yet it has taken root in the Whitehall culture, gagging its own citizens and preventing them from knowing the actions undertaken in their name. The Government should scrap it, and replace it with the Freedom of Information Act it promised, buttressed by a new mechanism to prevent acts of betrayal which genuinely threaten national security. For at its core, this is a matter of democracy: if this is an elected government, the voters have the right to know what it's up to.

The second welcome outcome is less obvious. By refusing Britain's request, Judge Elisabeth Ponroy refused to play the old political game, in which neighbouring governments approach extradition requests less as judicial questions than as political favours. Her action is in step with the gradual emergence of a world judicial order, epitomised by the new international criminal court whose establishment was recently agreed in Rome. Such an order's guiding principle will, we hope, be to put justice above *realpolitik*.

Finally, the Shayler case has shed some helpful light on the institutional problems that dog the British security services. Not least of these is the absence of a credible safety valve, by which disaffected employees might let off steam before feeling compelled to go public. Last month's report by the Commons Intelligence and Security Committee wisely recommended the creation of "normal" industrial tribunals for complainants. The Government should hear that advice — and the more searching implications of a welcome decision.

Gore plays the democracy card

THE WORLD is used to American politicians lecturing other countries on how to run their affairs. The message is usually put in terms which conform to the United States' own interests, and concentrates on economic prescriptions — open markets, free movement of capital, and untrammelled access for foreign investment. When it strays into issues of democracy and human rights, it tends to be couched in low-key terms. No wonder, then, that Vice-President Al Gore caused a storm with his performance in Malaysia. Speaking for Bill Clinton, he broke with the customary diplomatic code by picking up the word "Reformasi" which Malaysia's opposition uses and endorsing the "brave people" calling for change. By declining bilateral meetings with the government, he added salt to the wounds.

It would be easy to knock Mr Gore by concentrating on his motives. Malaysia, after all, is a relatively risk-free target of little strategic significance. In defence of so-called Asian values its prime minister, Mahathir Mohamad, has been equally outspoken himself. His younger one-time deputy, Anwar Ibrahim, now being hounded in the Malaysian courts, has a neo-liberal view of economic policy that is closer to Mr Gore's. By taking sides with him Washington is clearly looking to ingratiate itself with the next generation of Malaysian leaders in the hope that they will be more sympathetic to the prevailing US ideology.

While this is all true, Mr Gore made a broader point that democracies do better than authoritarian regimes in coping with economic downturns. Though the speech contained no self-criticism of past American policy, this was a profound shift. For years Washington supported the hard-line government of Indonesia's President Suharto on the grounds that it could best guarantee prosperity. It took a similar line in South Korea until the last presidential election there. As long as economies were broadly on the upswing, the US saw democracy as a lesser issue. The arrival of crisis has caused the re-think.

Now the message should be addressed to the economies of the Gulf with their excessive reliance on the waning asset of oil. Will Washington start to tell the repressive Arab regimes of the region that they must move towards pluralism and representative government? The Clinton/Gore message does not apply to Malaysia alone.

No relief from the disasters of war

John Ryle

NOW is the season of charity, when appeals from aid agencies fall thick and fast on the mat, and conscientious citizens try to balance their well-being against the suffering of those in less fortunate circumstances. Confronted with images of destitution from the disaster zone, we experience moral conflict — pity and helplessness.

What can be done to prevent this suffering? And who should do it? Should we give money to emergency appeals that try to get food to the starving? Should we do it year after year? Are these operations effective? Is it more important to work towards a world where such disasters happen less? And how do you do that? The answer depends on your understanding of history and politics. It also depends on the kind of disaster you are talking about.

The emergencies that have received most media attention this year — the hurricane in Honduras and Nicaragua, the famine in Sudan — illustrate the difference clearly. The floods in Central America are a sudden, natural disaster; nothing could have prevented them. They affected poor countries without the resources to cope. An aid operation was clearly appropriate and was carried out with relative efficiency.

The famine in Sudan, on the other hand, is the result of a long-running political crisis. Too much war on top of too little rain. In southern Sudan in peacetime, a drought or flood is something people can cope with; in wartime it may be the last straw. The same is true in Somalia, where famine is currently a threat. And in Angola — but there no one can be sure, because large areas of the country are inaccessible to aid workers.

Most disasters are a mess of war, displacement, hunger and ignorance that aid workers call a "complex emergency". Aid operations in these situations are much more expensive, less efficient, and politically more problematic than dealing with a hurricane. To feed the hungry and treat the sick is to become part of the war economy. The price aid agencies pay for access to needy populations is collaboration with governments or rebel forces. The first concern of these local powers is probably not the well-being of the people. It is their own survival.

In Somalia, for example, local militias operate protection rackets that force aid agencies to employ them as guards in order not to be attacked; in Sudan the government periodically denies permission for relief flights to strategic areas of the south; in southern Sudan rebels tithe food relief. In Congo, after the war in Rwanda, aid agencies were in an even more compromising position. In providing for Hutu refugees who fled from the new, Tutsi-dominated government, they were assisting the perpetrators of the genocide concealed in their midst.

It is hard to be a relief worker. It is also increasingly dangerous. In the past six or seven years, nearly a hundred aid workers have been killed in the line of duty. It can be more dangerous to be an aid worker than a soldier. The moral paradoxes of relief make the job still harder.

Part of what aid workers do involves clearing up the chaos left by the global arms trade; when they become victims of it themselves, it is a grim irony. If you want to help people in the disaster zone, you have to think politically. There's a consensus that freedom from hunger depends on a country having freedom of information, a stable government and a reasonable communications infrastructure.

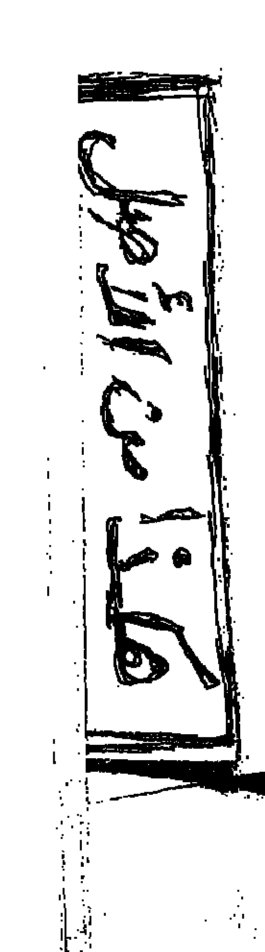
THIS IS why India has experienced no serious famine in recent times. To get to that stage in countries like Sudan and Somalia will take a long time. In the meantime, what is more important: to combat the arms trade? To give to human rights groups that strive to make governments accountable to their citizens? Or to aid agencies involved in the relief of suffering?

There are no simple answers, but we can expect those who are asking us to contribute to link the issues together. Some problems faced by aid agencies in complex emergencies are the result of treating political crises as though they were natural disasters. Maintaining neutrality has meant that they downplay the politics. They fall back on the argument that they are saving lives.

And they are. But for what? To be lost in endless wars that feed on aid? Victims of hurricanes and victims of war all need assistance. But the problem is not the same. Relief organisations are now confronting the political problems in which they have involved themselves. And their supporters should encourage this trend if their aim is the modest-sounding, but ambitious, goal of leaving the world a better place.

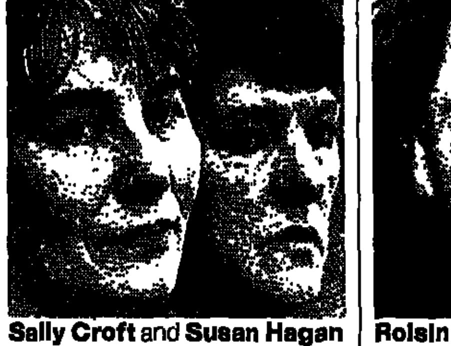
E-mail: john.ryle@ibm.net







Paul Bennett
February 1991. Wanted for deception, the New Zealand pilot was extradited from South Africa to New Zealand via Heathrow. The High Court quashed his prosecution in 1994 because of unlawful arrest in Johannesburg and flight to England.



Sally Croft and **Susan Hagan**
July 1994. The two former followers of the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh were extradited to the US to face charges of conspiracy to murder an Oregon law official. A judge described their fourth application for judicial review of the decision 'an abuse'.



Roisin McAliskey
March 1998. Home Secretary Jack Straw released the daughter of Bernadette McAliskey, halting the German application to extradite her over an IRA mortar attack on a British army base in 1996. He said the extradition would be unjust and oppressive.

The slow road to extradition

There are few hiding places left for criminals as the global reach of extradition treaties grows. The Pinochet case shows the next move ought to be in the direction of creating international courts, writes **Alan Travis**



General Pinochet: awaiting the Law Lords' ruling
PHOTOGRAPHS: FELVIN DUTES, JOANNA WALTON AYRES, REUTERS, AFP

THE House of Lords is due to decide this week whether the former Chilean dictator, General Pinochet, should be handed over to the Spanish authorities: it represents a milestone in the history of extradition in Britain.

The ruling is expected to confirm Britain's international reputation as one of the hardest countries from which to secure an extradition, though Home Office lawyers might feel France has some claim to the title, after their failure last week to hand over the former MI5 agent David Shayler. But the Pinochet case is likely to prove the exception to the rule. The vast majority of extradition requests to Britain — involving routine but serious criminal cases — do succeed. Britain's reputation probably owes more to the length of time the complex process takes.

Extradition is a request from one government to another to return people suspected or convicted of crimes to the country which wishes to try or punish them. Although extradition is often assumed to be a political decision, in most countries, including Britain, it is actually a matter for the courts, with some exceptional powers given to the Home Secretary to make a final decision.

The reason cases can take so long in Britain is that at every stage there is a right of appeal built into the process — including the possibility of judicial review of the Home Office's role — right up to and including the House of Lords. For example, in the case of the two British Bhagwan women, Sally-Ann Croft and Susan Hagan, they were sent back to the United States four years after the initial extradition request had been made. By the time they stood trial it was nine years after the alleged conspiracy to murder an Oregon attorney had taken place.

It is a cliché to say that the world is shrinking, but for the British criminal fleeing abroad there are few hiding places left. Even if the Pinochet case shows that there are still limits to the effectiveness of extradition, the growth of international treaties in this area means that a fugitive is no longer guaranteed a safe haven.

At the last count there were 145 countries with which Britain had extradition agreements. The remaining havens tend to be Middle Eastern states which in the past have held little allure for British criminals. The arrest of Kenneth Noye in Cadiz in connection with the murder of Stephen Cameron was a clear signal that the favourite bolthole of British villains fleeing justice was no longer such an easy option. Spain's old reputation as the Costa del Crime rests largely on the collapse in 1978 of a 100-year-old extradition treaty which Benjamin Disraeli had a hand in negotiating. But by 1985 the treaty had been revived and the loophole closed again.

Among those who headed for the Spanish sun in the early 1980s was Ronnie Knight, former husband of the actress Barbara Windsor, but he came home to face the music and seven years' imprisonment in 1995 for his part in a Security Express robbery. As the latest (unpublished) Home Office figures show, Spain is now once again at the top of the list of countries from which Britain is seeking to bring back suspected criminals to stand trial in London.

Perhaps an even more powerful illustration of the growing global reach of the extradition laws was the delivery to the Brazilian ministry of foreign affairs a year ago of a formal request for the return of Ronald Biggs some eight weeks after the first British-Brazilian extradition treaty came into effect. Brazil, however, turned it down on the grounds, said Biggs, that "everything is forgiven and forgotten after 20 years".

The basic rules were last consolidated in the 1989 Extradition Act which brought together the European Convention on Extradition, the Commonwealth arrangements for extradition, and several bilateral treaties. The single exception was the question of extraditions from the Irish Republic, which well into the late 1980s too often failed because of perceived technical flaws either side of the water. The peace process has transformed that.

Extradition agreements usually contain five basic safeguards. The first is that the crime of which a suspect is accused must be an offence in both the countries concerned. This is not as straightforward as it may sound and can prove profitable territory for a government trying to make progress on securing the return of other fugitives it is interested in. For example, in the mid-1990s Spain refused to send back to Germany an ex-Nazi who was still active in far-right politics to face charges of denying that the Holocaust had taken place. The Spanish appeal court refused to recognise that Holocaust denial was itself a crime and so rejected the extradition request.

The second safeguard concerns "double jeopardy", which means that somebody cannot be prosecuted in two different countries for the same offence. The third is known as "speciality protection", which means that a suspect cannot be prosecuted for crimes other than those for which he was extradited. It means that the original warrant has to be detailed and precise in the charges it makes against an accused.

A FOURTH safeguard is more controversial and is known as the "political offences exception" but also extends to other human rights grounds including race, religion or nationality. It bans extradition of those accused of political crimes and also prevents the return of somebody when the authorities believe that the real motivation of a criminal extradition warrant is to persecute or punish the person for other reasons.

Although there have been many attempts to frustrate extradition on these grounds, few in Britain have succeeded. However, lawyers for David Shayler succeeded last week in their attempt to persuade the French authorities that the British extradition warrant should be struck out on political grounds.

The last major case in which this "political offences exception" was exercised in London involved an opposition politician in Fiji, Mohamed Rafiq Kahan, in 1989. The Bow Street magistrates actually threw out the extradition request after hearing evidence of political motivation even though it had already been approved by the Home Secretary.

Indeed, in recent years the grounds on which political exceptions can be made have been eroded by successive international conventions to combat terrorism and hostage-taking. The International Convention on Genocide has for 30 years exempted those who have engaged in mass murder from avoiding extradition on political grounds.

But whatever the decision of the courts, the Home Secretary does have a residual discretion to prevent an extradition warrant from going ahead in exceptional circumstances. The power under the 1989 legislation says he must refuse extradition if he thinks it would be "unjust or oppressive". It was this power that Jack Straw used in March this year to block the extradition to Germany of the Irish Republican, Roisin McAliskey. The Home Secretary said that her medical condition meant that she should not have to stand trial in Germany for bombing offences against the British army barracks at Osnabrück.

It looks as though extradition proceedings in future will be speedier. Most excitingly, the creation of an international court is moving into the realm of political possibility. This would ensure that the Pol Pots and Saddam Husseins of the future would be held personally responsible for their crimes against humanity. Questions of immunity for actions carried out by former heads of state would remain to be answered. But if there were an international court there would be less ambiguity about the position of a "third" country (Spain, in the Pinochet case) which at present needs to stake a claim to jurisdiction if it wants to try an international fugitive. As Foreign Office ministers have pointed out, it has been a paradox of the 20th century that those who murder one person are more likely to be brought to justice than those who plot genocide against millions.

The next century is likely to see the emergence of an international judicial order based on a near-universal application of extradition to ensure that there are no hiding places left for those whom the civilised international community considers criminals.

To extradite or not to extradite

British fugitives
Extradition requests made by the UK, 1998

15 / 10 / 5 / 0
Netherlands 5, Germany 4, France, Australia

Foreign fugitives
Extradition requests received by the UK, 1998

15 / 10 / 5 / 0

Safe from the law
Countries with which the UK does not have extradition agreements

China
Egypt
Japan
Marshall Islands
Pakistan
Saudi Arabia
Taiwan
Ukraine
Vatican City
Venezuela

Costa del crime?
UK extradition requests to Spain since 1985: 110, of which:

Outstanding	Withdrawn	Refused	Returned
27	24	8	51

Pinochet's haven?
Spanish requests to the UK since 1985: 54, of which:

Outstanding	Withdrawn	Refused	Refused	Returned	Prosecuted in UK
24	14	10	4	1	1

GRAPHIC: BARBARA SHEEHY

Finns shiver in Russian bear market

Mark Atkinson

ANNIKKA Salokannel stares out from her modest jewellery kiosk at the deserted duty-free centre at Vaalimaa border station, the busiest crossing point for land-based trade and tourism between Russia and Finland, and contemplates another long, slow day.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1990s, Russians have been flooding across the border from nearby St Petersburg and the surrounding area in increasing numbers to satisfy their voracious appetite for Western consumer goods, and swelling the pockets of local retailers in the process. But since August the tills have stopped ringing.

"The Russians who come here just look, they don't buy any more," says Annikka. "If they buy, they buy clothes and food, something more important than gold rings."



The economic shockwaves from Russia's financial collapse three months ago are spreading from the East to the West, like the earlier-than-usual winter, which has covered Finland in a blanket of snow since early November. As the only European Union member to share a border with Russia, Finland is bearing the brunt of the big bear's recent misfortune.

It's not just the purchasing power of Russian tourists that has been hit by the devaluation of the rouble. Wholesale exports to Russia have also slumped. The number of trucks passing through Vaalimaa border station en route to Russia fell from 11,791 in April to 6,577 in October. In the other direction, the reduction in traffic volumes is equally sharp, with 7,406 trucks arriving at Vaalimaa in October, compared with 15,854 in March.

It's the same story at the nearby port of Kotka, Finland's biggest export harbour and the main gateway to Russia by sea. There, Ari-Pekka Saari, administration director of Steveco Oy, a port operating company which handles about 25 per cent of Finnish exports, says that Russian-bound container traffic has fallen, from between 7,000 and 8,000 units a month between January and May to about 2,500 per month now.

"We are hoping it will go up again. We would like to do this business for the next 100 years, but it has been a really bad autumn," Mr Saari says.

At any other time, a fall in business with Russia might not be much of a problem. It accounts for only about 7 per cent of Finnish exports. But, as an export-oriented economy, Finland, which sends 40 per cent of its output abroad, is also heavily exposed to the deflationary economic winds from Asia.

As a result, business confidence has plunged, and economic growth is forecast by the Bank of Finland to slow sharply next year to 2.8 per cent in line with its long-term trend, compared with about 5 per cent this year.

In normal circumstances, with inflation firmly under control at less than 2 per cent, the central bank could be expected to guard against the too severe a slowdown by cutting interest rates, just as the Bank of England's monetary policy committee has done at a similar stage of the UK's economic cycle.

But Finland's hands are tied by its decision to join the euro. The monetary authorities are unperturbed. Matti Vanhala, governor of the central bank in Helsinki, says the economic situation is "quite good" and could have been much worse had it not been for the protection offered from financial market turbulence by Finland's commitment to the euro.

While other Nordic currencies, such as the Swedish krona and Norwegian krone, have been buffeted by the markets in recent months, the Finnish markka has been a rock of stability.

"It was one of these considerations we always had in mind when we decided to join," Mr Vanhala says. Critics of European Monetary Union focus on the dangers of countries being unable to use interest rates to respond independently to specific shocks to their economies, but they often fail to recognise the problem of small currencies being destabilised by capital flows unrelated to economic fundamentals, he says.

However, the new economic situation is not free from danger. Finland has a history of inflation to rival the UK's. After six years of export-led growth, domestic demand, dominated by sectors with low productivity growth, may now take up the running.

SO FAR, responsible collective bargaining has kept costs under control. Simo Pinomaa, economic policy adviser at the Confederation of Finnish Industry and Employers, says price competitiveness in Finland is currently about 30 per cent above the average recorded by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. But with unemployment falling, and staff shortages emerging in some sectors, unions are starting to mutter about wanting a bigger slice of the cake.

The general mood is, however, one of cheerful resignation rather than despair. After decades of trading with Russia, they are used to the volatile business climate which governs East/West relations.

Seated around the table at the local chamber of commerce, the managing director Jukka Pesu, Timo Huttunen, director of the Huttunen Transport Company, banker Olli-Pekka Toukola and Hannu Lahtivesi, export manager of a roof tile company, amuse themselves by swapping anecdotes about their experiences.

Mr Huttunen recounts that the biggest importer of televisions in Russia in 1995 was an association of the blind; Mr Lahtivesi that when he worked in St Petersburg you could buy Finnish beer through an orphanage. Both scams were apparently designed to avoid customs duties.

A few months back the authorities were forced to intervene when Russian prostitutes set up a lucrative business at one of the roadside motels. Finnish customs say there was a 25 per cent rise in drug offences last year, with serious offences tripling.

Customs Inspector Juhani Kuntsi says the black market trade in amphetamines is booming, although the most common currency for smugglers is cigarettes and vodka, which can be sold by Russians on the Finnish side of the border for a fat profit.

Mr Pesu says there is no way of knowing whether the money the Russians spend is derived from illegal activities. The members of his chamber of commerce just take it, no questions asked. This winter they will need all they can get.

Rates cut urged to avoid world recession

Larry Elliott and Charlotte Denny

THE West's leading economic think-tank last week cut its forecasts for world growth next year and urged policy makers to keep lowering interest rates in an effort to head off recession.

Cutting its growth forecast for 29 leading economies from 2.5 per cent to 1.7 per cent, the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development said that in the United States and the euro area: "Monetary policy should remain biased towards easing, as inflation risks have been considerably reduced or become non-existent."

The OECD lowered its estimate of British economic growth next year from 1.8 per cent to 0.8 per cent, compared with the UK Treasury's prediction of expansion of between 1 per cent and 1.5 per cent.

Economists at the 29-nation think tank also believe that the UK will recover much more slowly than the Government expects, with growth of 1.5 per cent in 2000 against Chancellor Gordon Brown's estimate of 2.25 to 2.75 per cent.

The OECD suggested the main risk to the UK was from possible effects of the slump in Asia, which could send financial markets crashing and affect confidence. But it also warned the Bank of England of the dangers of keeping interest rates too high for fear of a wage-price spiral.

The OECD highlighted four separate threats to the global economy — a resurgence of protectionism; a meltdown in the Japanese banking system; a failure to cut interest rates quickly enough; and the risk of financial contagion spreading to South America.

While the economies in Europe and North America have remained robust, "confidence in many countries has begun to be adversely influenced by the extent and duration of the crisis, as well as the diminishing prospects for any early turnaround," the report said. "Financial turbulence has now spread to the point where few, if any countries remain untouched."

The OECD said that growth in the three main Western trading blocs would be slower next year than it had predicted before Russia's debt default triggered a second wave of financial turbulence. Despite the fiscal package announced last week, Japan's economy is expected to grow by only 0.2 per cent following a contraction of 2.6 per cent this year. In the summer, the OECD had pencilled in growth of 1.3 per cent for Japan next year and only a small recession in 1998.

The United States — hitherto the engine of world growth — is expected to suffer a marked slowdown in growth next year from 3.5 per cent to 1.5 per cent. With the advent of the single currency only a few weeks away, the OECD said that European Union prospects were now weaker than it had forecast in the summer.

Growth next year would be 2.2 per cent against 2.8 per cent this year, leaving the unemployment rate stuck at more than 10 per cent.

In Brief

THE Dow Jones index hit a record high on Monday, returning to levels not seen since mid-July. Analysts said the Federal Reserve's three cuts in interest rates and a recovery in Asian markets have restored confidence in the long-term prospects for the US economy.

MICROSOFT agreed to modify its Windows 98 operating system to comply with a federal court order, after a judge ordered it to stop shipping software that illegally used the Sun Microsystems Java program.

Reality check, page 27

PROSPECTS for the world's poorest countries received a lift when donor nations agreed to establish a $20.5 billion lending facility to alleviate poverty.

THE French state-owned group, Electricité de France, is set to win control of London Electricity with a bid in excess of $3.3 billion. But victory is certain to provoke a row over British access to energy markets in the rest of the European Union and trigger a monopolies and mergers investigation.

A $206 billion settlement of health claims against American tobacco companies won the support of all states. Philip Morris, RJR Nabisco, Loews Corporation and British American Tobacco will pay the money to 46 states over 26 years. Mississippi, Texas, Florida and Minnesota had already settled their claims for $40 billion.

BRITAIN and Germany set up a joint body to look at ways of creating jobs and reforming the economy. But the UK chancellor, Gordon Brown, said tax was one issue on which the governments took a "different view".

HUNDREDS of redundancies were threatened in the UK as the gloom surrounding Marks & Spencer spread. Clothing suppliers are beginning to feel the pinch as M&S directors are enmeshed in battles over the successor to Sir Richard Greenbury, its chief executive.

FOREIGN EXCHANGES

	Sterling rates November 23	Sterling rates November 16
Australia	2.5753-2.5787	2.6153-2.6184
Austria	19.81-19.83	19.64-19.65
Belgium	58.08-58.15	57.57-57.66
Canada	2.5554-2.5585	2.6065-2.6092
Denmark	10.70-10.71	10.61-10.62
France	9.44-9.45	9.36-9.37
Germany	2.8155-2.8182	2.7916-2.7936
Hong Kong	12.79-12.80	12.96-12.97
Ireland	1.1316-1.1361	1.1221-1.1241
Italy	2,767-2,790	2,762-2,764
Japan	199.82-200.10	200.75-200.82
Netherlands	3.1742-3.1776	3.1475-3.1500
New Zealand	3.0983-3.1040	3.1095-3.1149
Norway	12.36-12.38	12.48-12.49
Portugal	288.87-289.27	288.29-288.57
Spain	239.50-239.71	237.41-237.67
Sweden	13.38-13.40	13.51-13.53
Switzerland	2.3207-2.3234	2.2981-2.2999
USA	1.6523-1.6532	1.6751-1.6768
ECU	1.4313-1.4338	1.4187-1.4202

FTSE100 Share Index up 237.0 at 5848.4. FTSE 250 Index up 88.0 at 4901.3. Gold up $1.35 at $299.55.

U.S. Agents Bust Global Smuggling Ring

William Branigin

IN THE largest such case in U.S. history, federal agents have dismantled a global immigrant smuggling operation that brought as many as 12,000 people, most of them Indians, into the United States over a three-year period at the behest of employers who placed orders for cheap, compliant workers, U.S. officials announced last week.

Most of the illegal immigrants were smuggled in through Moscow and Cuba by a ring that operated on four continents and amassed more than $200 million in smuggling fees.

Although the Immigration and Naturalization Service described the ring as the largest and most sophisticated ever encountered, officials said its vast operations accounted for only a fraction of the tens of thousands of illegal immigrants smuggled into the United States each year. An estimated 275,000 illegal aliens settle annually, and smuggling organizations play an increasingly important role in sneaking them into the country.

In the past few weeks INS agents have arrested 21 suspects in five states, Puerto Rico and the Bahamas, culminating a year-long investigation in which the agency for the first time used new federal wiretapping authority granted under the sweeping 1996 immigration law. Among those picked up were two of the operation's three alleged ringleaders — all Indians with residences in London, the Bahamas or Quito, Ecuador. The third suspected ringleader is believed to be in India, officials said.

The three are among 31 defendants who were charged with various counts of alien-smuggling, conspiracy and money-laundering in Dallas, where the case will be prosecuted. Ten suspects are still at large.

The ring, consisting of three overlapping organizations, smuggled mostly Indians, but also collected people from countries like Pakistan, Syria and Afghanistan.

INS agents in Dallas initiated the investigation after finding a group of Indians who were being transported to job sites in other states.

Attorney General Janet Reno said the beneficiaries were "employers who wanted cheap labor and fearful workers who could be easily manipulated."

INS officials said the case marked the first time that a major alien-smuggling operation has been completely taken down — from the kingpins who run the operations from overseas havens to the smugglers who move the immigrants into the United States to the money-launderers who transfer the proceeds.

"Our goal was to dismantle these flesh cartels from top to bottom . . . and attack them as vigorously as we attack drug cartels," said Paul E. Coggins, the U.S. attorney in Dallas who is prosecuting the case. He said the illegal immigrants were smuggled to more than 1,000 job sites in at least 38 states. He declined to elaborate on what specific businesses received them, saying that a second phase of the investigation would target employers, who could face "criminal, civil and administrative penalties if they knowingly hired illegal aliens." He said no employers have yet been charged.

The ring charged the illegal immigrants $20,000 to $28,000 each to be smuggled into the U.S. through circuitous routes that often took months to complete.

First Launch Heralds New Era in Space

EDITORIAL

THE Manhattan ticker-tape parade this month for astronaut and senator John Glenn marked the end of an era associated with individual heroics in space. With the successful Russian launch last week of the first module of the international space station — an alliance of 16 nations — a new, more collaborative period got underway. The "Right Stuff" battles of the past — to be first in space, first in orbit, first to the moon and so on — are now well and truly over.

If all goes according to plan — a Jupiter-sized "if" — the station will become a nearly permanent orbiting laboratory where teams of seven scientists work for long stretches of time. It is to be assembled piece by piece, spacewalk by spacewalk, launch after launch, during the next five years — a hugely ambitious project. It's clear that the first two modules, Zarya ("Sunrise") and Unity, were named with fingers crossed.

A case can easily be made that the whole convoluted scheme is crazy. It will divert billions of dollars from other scientific projects. Robots in space could work far more cheaply, and often as well. It's almost a given that somewhere along the way the project will be struck by disasters, large and small. The scientific rationales are a stretch.

But there's never been an entirely logical justification for the space program beyond the fact that space is the obvious next destination for a species of explorers. The space station, in that sense, is the obvious next step. Whether that step leads to interplanetary travel, moon colonization or something we can't today foretell isn't clear. But that, in a way, is the point.

A digital impression shows the international space station as it will be when completed in 2004

Republicans Still at Sea Over Clinton

…lanin and Helen Dewar

EVEN as Judiciary Committee Republicans push for articles of impeachment against President Clinton for lying about his affair with Monica S. Lewinsky, most other House Republicans appear torn by the decision or eager to find a way out of the thicket.

Dozens of interviews with House Republicans conducted during and after independent counsel Kenneth W. Starr's day-long testimony last week revealed little, if any, enthusiasm for a protracted impeachment battle with Clinton.

What's more, a few Republicans have begun speaking out against impeachment, which could enhance prospects that Congress will seek a face-saving alternative — such as censure — to end the crisis.

"I'm very certain there are not enough votes to impeach the president," said Rep. Peter T. King, R-New York, one of the opponents. While the allegations against the president may well constitute violations of the law, he said, "I do not believe they are impeachable offenses comparable to treason or bribery."

Members' search for a way out is propelled by several factors, not least of which is their recognition that the Senate is unlikely to muster the two-thirds majority needed to convict and remove the president. But many also fear Clinton might go unpunished unless an alternative sanction is found. And some lawmakers appear genuinely conflicted over whether the president's conduct merits throwing him out of office.

"I want to hear why these offenses are impeachable," said Rep. Jack Kingston, R-Georgia. "I think that's going to be the case with lots of members. I'm not 100 percent convinced they are impeachable. I want to know more."

Starr's 12 hours of testimony may have emboldened GOP members of the Judiciary Committee in their drive for impeachment, but other House Republicans are far more divided about the wisdom of that approach. There was little discernible evidence that the independent counsel's appearance — while deemed impressive by many — had much impact in changing minds. And even some conservatives who have criticized the president were musing about finding creative alternatives out of the crisis.

Rep. David M. McIntosh of Indiana, the leader of the House GOP's conservative caucus, said he is intrigued by the idea of impeaching and convicting the president for lying about the Lewinsky affair and obstructing justice, but allowing him to complete his term with the proviso that he could never again hold public office.

"I don't think the Constitution provides for censure," he said. "It would establish a bad precedent and weaken our form of government. I do think we have to do our duty and determine whether high crimes and misdemeanors were committed."

Five Republicans, including senior members of the appropriations and budget committees and a prominent conservative activist, have said they will vote no should the House Judiciary Committee report out articles of impeachment next month. A handful of other moderates have indicated privately that they will oppose impeachment but are not yet ready to make that stance public.

Bonn Urges New Nuclear Doctrine

William Drozdiak in Berlin

GERMANY'S new left-wing government is facing its first serious clash with the United States by proposing that NATO break one of its central strategic doctrines and pledge that it will never be the first to use nuclear weapons.

Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's coalition government plans to press its case for the change at a key meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Brussels on December 8 and 9. Germany will argue that a new overall strategic doctrine being prepared for NATO, to be unveiled at the alliance's 50th anniversary summit conference in Washington next April, should rule out use of nuclear weapons before any foe to prove that Western powers are serious about eventual nuclear disarmament, according to senior German officials.

The initiative has shocked and angered the Clinton administration, which recently was assured that the new German government, made up of Schroeder's Social Democrats and the environmentalist Greens, would maintain continuity in Bonn's foreign and security policies. U.S. officials warned that such a dramatic shift in deterrence strategy — one that has kept the nuclear peace for more than 50 years — could gravely undermine faith in NATO's military commitments.

But German officials say fundamental changes in NATO's nuclear doctrine are long overdue. They argue that bold initiatives such as a no-first-use pledge are necessary to dissuade other nations from pursuing nuclear arms and to encourage threshold powers such as India and Pakistan to renounce any recourse to weapons of mass destruction.

Officials say the proposal could dominate discussion at the upcoming NATO ministers' meeting and lead to an acrimonious public debate among the allies. "I have signaled to NATO Secretary General Javier Solana that we want to talk about this, because we see things differently," German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer told the news magazine Spiegel. "We must discuss it openly in the alliance without creating the impression that Germany is going its own way now."

The no-first-use pledge was quickly enshrined in the governing program hammered out by the Social Democrats and the Greens after they ousted Helmut Kohl's conservative coalition in last September's elections. Both parties have crusaded for nuclear disarmament in the past, but they downplayed the issue ahead of the vote.

Earlier this month, Germany stunned the U.S., Britain and France — NATO's three nuclear powers — by breaking ranks and abstaining on a motion on nuclear disarmament put forward by neutral countries at the United Nations. German officials acknowledged that endorsing the disarmament proposal would have triggered a major row with its leading allies, but they said the new government wanted to serve notice it was serious about campaigning to have NATO renounce first-use and to diminish the alert status of its nuclear weapons.

Clinton and Kim Defend Policy Toward Pyongyang

Kevin Sullivan and John F. Harris in Seoul

PRESIDENT CLINTON and South Korean President Kim Dae Jung last weekend delivered impassioned defenses of their policies of engagement toward North Korea, in the face of seemingly belligerent actions by Pyongyang.

Asked if provocation by North Korea could undermine U.S. and South Korean policy, President Clinton responded: "Of course it could. But . . . I am absolutely convinced that the policies we have followed together have been correct."

While Clinton and Kim stand united in their desire to coax North Korea into the sunlight with economic and political engagement, conservative critics in both countries are increasing their calls to give North Korea more stick and less carrot. That criticism, which has taken on new urgency in recent weeks, threatens to scuttle delicate engagement policies that Clinton and Kim have spent years building and defending.

Members of the U.S. Congress and many South Korean officials have expressed concern at recent reports that Pyongyang is increasing its production and export of ballistic missiles, and that it is building a massive underground facility that may be related to reviving its nuclear weapons program.

Even as Clinton and Kim spoke inside the ornate presidential Blue House, legislators, academics and people on the streets of Seoul were voicing grave doubts about North Korea's intentions.

"Where do we draw the line?" said Lee Jung Hoon, political science professor at Yonsei University in Seoul. "Aren't we being a little too cozy and comfortable and relaxed toward North Korea, when their position really hasn't changed at all?"

Shopkeeper Chang Sun Il, 54, said, "Now is not the time to pour our money into North Korea. . . . North Korea is up to something and we are adding fuel on the fire. It's like pouring water into a broken vase — no matter what you do, it will never fill up to the top."

Clinton and Kim were keenly aware of the building storm of criticism and defended their policies as realistic and pragmatic.

Kim called his "sunshine policy" of engagement the most "realistic" policy toward North Korea, while warning that Seoul would get tough with Pyongyang if it does not explain the purpose of the mysterious underground facility.

Clinton called engagement one element of a "clear-eyed mixture" of diplomacy and deterrence, including the military option presented by 37,000 U.S. troops stationed in South Korea. And he warned that Congress will abandon support for key initiatives toward North Korea if Pyongyang does not come clean on its missile program and nuclear ambitions.



Vincent van Gogh's 1889 self-portrait Artist Without Beard: Last week it became the third most valuable painting sold at auction when it fetched $71 million at a Christie's sale in New York

Arms Draw China and Russia Closer

John Pomfret in China

THE scene at the Sukhoi aircraft company's bustling office here at the Zhuhai air show last week reminded one Russian weapons engineer of the "old days" when China and Russia walked together on the road to Communism.

In a small room, a Chinese delegation negotiated with officials from the aerospace firm. Russian officials said the Chinese are interested in adding Sukhoi's Su-30 fighter bomber to their arsenal, along with a state-of-the-art anti-ship missile. China is a good customer to Russia's arms manufacturers — it already owns Russian fighters, submarines and anti-aircraft batteries.

"China and Russia [used to be] allies," said Vladimir Konohov, the lead designer of the Su-37, one of Russia's top fighters. "Perhaps that day will come again."

Fifty years ago, a shared ideology brought China and Russia together before that relationship degenerated into recriminations and border skirmishes in the 1960s. Today, Chinese cash and a concern about the United States' domination of world affairs are fueling a renaissance in ties between the two giants.

On Sunday, Jiang Zemin traveled to Russia for the sixth summit between the two countries and the first informal "no-necktie" meeting with Boris Yeltsin, the ailing Russian president. Jiang is expected to offer food as well as cash to aid Russia's economy, Chinese sources said.

Russia's ambassador to Beijing, Igor Rogachev, told China's official New China News Agency last week that the trip was a sign that decades of hostility between Russia and China had given way to a powerful "strategic partnership" that aims to forge a "new order" to challenge U.S. domination of the world arena.

China has backed Russia's stance in supporting Yugoslavia's President Slobodan Milosevic on Kosovo and echoed Moscow's calls for a peaceful settlement of the standoff with Iraq. Chinese officials have noted publicly that Russia sides with China in its opposition to U.S. plans for a theater missile defense network in Asia.

No one expects Beijing's ties to Moscow to eclipse China's relations with Washington. China's trade with Russia, for example, is only a fraction of its trade with the United States: $4.12 billion with Russia for the first nine months of 1998 compared with more than $60 billion in the same period with the U.S. Historical distrust also bedevils the relationship, as does China's desire to play a greater role in central Asia and Mongolia — areas that Moscow regards as its turf.

Nonetheless, the emerging ties have raised eyebrows in the West and Asia because the bulk of the relationship is founded on Russian arms sales to China's People's Liberation Army (PLA). During the past four years, for example, arms sales from Russia to China accounted for roughly one-quarter of the two countries' total trade, or $1 billion a year.

China is Russia's second-biggest arms customer next to India. Western defense experts say its main weapons purchases from Russia are designed not to help China fill short-term combat capability but to gain access to advanced technology. China has bought four Kilo-class submarines and 48 Sukhoi-produced Su-27 fighter jets, and has signed a licensing deal to produce about 200 more in China. Beijing is thought to have ordered two Sovremenniy-class destroyers being built in St. Petersburg.

More important, Russian media reported in April that the Progress aviation firm in Arsenyev, in Russia's Far East, has started producing 30 Sunburn anti-ship missiles for China. The Sunburn is one of the few missiles that can travel at twice the speed of sound while skimming the ocean's surface.

"This one could hurt us," said an official at the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency.

CHINA'S shopping spree in Moscow comes when the rest of Asia is reeling from an economic crisis that has gutted arms acquisition programs. This has left China, Taiwan, Singapore and, to a lesser extent, Japan as the only countries bolstering their arsenals — raising concern in other Asian capitals.

Thailand, for example, can only afford to deploy its new 11,485-ton aircraft carrier once a month. It also has canceled the purchase of eight U.S.-made F/A-18 fighters. Malaysia has delayed plans to buy its first submarines and 300 helicopters for its army air corps. South Korea's defense forces delayed buying $1 billion in U.S. arms. And Indonesia canceled the purchase of 12 Russian-made Su-30K multi-role fighters and eight Mi-17V helicopters.

Russian officials have told their Western counterparts that Russia is not supplying China with its best technology.

"The line out of the Russian Embassy is that anyone privy to all the details of these deals is not that uncomfortable that Russia is giving away the farm," said a Western diplomat in Beijing. "Also, they have a pretty healthy contempt for the Chinese military."

"We are selling the Chinese very little," said Lieutenant-General Vladimir Mikhailov, the vice commander of Russia's air force. Mikhailov was standing in a plush function room of the Zhuhai Hotel, having just exchanged toasts with several Chinese officials associated with the arms trade. "But if they want to buy the Su-30, we will sell it to them."

Defense experts think the Su-30 fighter-bomber would mark a significant upgrade for China's air force. Richard Fisher, a specialist on the Chinese military at the conservative Heritage Foundation in Washington, said selling the Su-30 to China would give Beijing "the basis of a modern strike capability."

Eric McVadon, a former U.S. Navy admiral and defense attache in Beijing, agreed that "Washington should worry about more advanced fighters and quiet diesel submarines that China might purchase from Russia.

"However," he added, "we should keep all this in perspective. China can use these things to make our lives more miserable in a future Taiwan crisis. Nevertheless, these purchases will not allow the PLA to surmount all its shortcomings and become a power able to threaten American power in Asia. The PLA is coming from a position of truly extraordinary backwardness and obsolescence."

Israeli Roads Carve up West Bank

Lee Hockstader in the West Bank

ON THE EVE of Israel's first troop withdrawal from the West Bank in two years, the government is expropriating large swaths of Palestinian land to build bypass roads for Jewish settlers.

The roads are part of an unintended effect of the American-brokered interim peace accord, known as the Wye River Memorandum, signed last month at the White House. The agreement, under which Israel will turn over an additional 13 percent of the West Bank to Palestinian control, was meant to advance the cause of Middle East peace while lowering the political temperature in the West Bank.

Instead, the accord has ignited fresh tensions as Israeli bulldozers have carved new bypass roads to areas in the West Bank where Jewish settlers rushed to stake a claim before it was too late.

"What kind of peace is this?" said Imad Salim, 25, a Palestinian farmer near the Arab village of Al Khadr, just south of Jerusalem. "If peace means losing our land, what good is it?"

A dozen new roads — more than 50 miles' worth in all, some up to 100 feet wide — will enable West Bank settlers to skirt Palestinian communities en route to other Jewish enclaves, as well as to Israel proper. The government insists the new roads are a security lifeline for Jewish settlers living in West Bank communities that will become more isolated when the Israeli troops withdraw, leaving 40 percent of the West Bank in Palestinian hands.

"Our goal is to prevent confrontations between the two groups," said Shlomo Dror, spokesman for Israel's civil administration in the occupied territories.

Few Palestinians regard road-building in the West Bank as being just about security, let alone convenience. They say the intent of the new roads, and their effect, is to strangle the natural growth of Palestinian towns and villages, to divide and control the West Bank by slicing it up and to defeat hopes for the establishment of a Palestinian state.

"This is Israel's policy," said Abdullah Ghneim, mayor of Al Khadr, a Palestinian village already hemmed in on two sides — and soon on a third — by Israeli bypass roads. "Their ultimate aim is to block an independent Palestinian state and to destroy any geographical continuity between Palestinian territories."

The roads were approved by Israel's cabinet — which was nudged by American pressure into a pullback from the West Bank it never really wanted — at the same meeting in which it assented to the withdrawal. Half the roads are already under construction, and the plan is to complete all 12 by the end of a three-stage troop withdrawal next February.

Shooting Too Much Too Often

Jeff Leen, Jo Craven, David Jackson and Sari Horwitz

WASHINGTON D.C.'s Metropolitan Police Department shot and killed more people per resident in the 1990s than any other American city police force.

Many shootings were acts of courage and even heroism. But internal police files and court records reveal a pattern of reckless and indiscriminate gunplay by officers sent into the streets with inadequate training and little oversight, an eight-month Washington Post investigation has found.

Washington's officers fire their weapons at more than double the rate of police in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago or Miami. Deaths and injuries in D.C. police shooting cases have resulted in nearly $8 million in court settlements and judgments against the District in the last six months alone.

"We shoot too often, and we shoot too much when we do shoot," said Executive Assistant Chief of Police Terrance W. Gainer, who became the department's second in command in May.

The shootings involve a small proportion of the District's 3,550 officers. But the details of individual cases can be chilling even to police veterans: An off-duty police officer out walking in August 1995 fired 11 times while trying to stop and unarmed motorist who had hit a utility pole and left the scene. An off-duty police officer fishing in May 1995 shot an unarmed man three times after arguing with him. In August, an officer chasing an irrational truck driver who had rammed several cars fired 38 times into the truck's cab, killing the unarmed driver.

The extent and pattern of police shootings have been obscured from public view. Police officials investigate incidents in secret, producing reports that become public only when a judge intercedes. In a small hearing room closed to the public, nine of every 10 shootings are ruled justified by department officials who read the reports filed by investigating officers but generally hear no witnesses.

Police shootings began to rise at the beginning of the decade with a huge infusion of new, ill-prepared recruits and the adoption of the light-trigger, highly advanced Glock 9mm handgun as the department's service weapon. By the mid-1990s, shootings by officers had doubled to record levels even as a succession of police administrations failed to accurately track shooting patterns or correct acknowledged deficiencies in firearm skills.

The Post's investigation revealed that, in the last five years, D.C. officers shot and killed 57 people — three more than police reported in Chicago, which has three times the police force and five times the population. During that period, D.C. officers were involved in 640 shooting incidents — 40 more than the Los Angeles Police Department, which has more than double the officers and serves six times the population. Since 1990, Washington police have shot and killed 85 people.

Nearly 75 percent of the District officers who used their weapons in 1996 failed to meet the District's basic firearms standards for using the Glock semiautomatic handgun, a weapon that requires a high degree of training and skill. There have been more than 120 unintentional discharges of the gun in the past decade; 19 officers have shot themselves or other officers accidentally.



Professional policing usually leaves suspects alive

In the internal records used to track shooting trends, D.C. police undercounted by nearly one-third the number of people they killed from 1994 to 1997, tallying only 29 fatal police shootings. The Post investigation confirmed 43 fatal police shootings in that period. Seven fatal shootings were missing from police shooting trend records, and seven other fatal shootings were mislabeled as nonfatal.

No one disputes that D.C. police have had ample reason to draw their weapons in many cases, and there have been many dangerous incidents in which officers displayed restraint and discipline. Indeed, eight District police officers were killed in Washington from 1990 to 1997 — a number surpassed by only a half-dozen other U.S. cities, each much bigger than the District.

Criminologists say no single factor fully explains police shooting trends. The Post considered five factors for Washington and 26 other large cities — population, violent crime, homicide, size of the force and violent crime arrests. By each of these measures, Washington is above the average for large cities in the number of police shootings.

Still, violent streets do not entirely explain the rise of D.C. police shootings in this decade. Fatal shootings by Washington police more than doubled from 1992 to 1995, while homicides dropped from the record peak in 1991.

Hurricane Mitch Disrupts Mine-Clearing Operation

Serge F. Kovaleski

THOUSANDS of land mines still buried in Central America from the region's civil wars may have been scattered by flooding and mudslides caused by Hurricane Mitch. Dislodged mines have killed at least two people, posing new safety hazards and disrupting an international effort to clear the isthmus of the explosives.

In Nicaragua, which has by far the largest number of mines in Central America — an estimated 73,000 — an adult was killed recently and another person was badly injured when one of the devices exploded, and a child died in another incident. Overall, in the years since the conflicts that ravaged the region in the 1980s and early 1990s ended, thousands of civilians in Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala have lost their lives or been maimed by mines and other unexploded devices left over from the wars.

Much of the information that mine removal experts had obtained from governments about the mines' locations is now in question, however, since so many of the devices are thought to have been pushed down mountain slopes and riverbeds during Mitch's drenching assault on Central America. Also, while some mines likely were undisturbed, others may have exploded during the storm.

Furthermore, officials said that large amounts of mud and debris will hamper efforts to detect and destroy mines, as will storm devastation inflicted on a new mine-removal base that had just been set up in Honduras near the Nicaraguan border.

"The complexity has changed and the urgency level has increased. The size of the envelope, if you will, has expanded," said William A. McDonough, a retired U.S. Army colonel and senior consultant to the Organization of American States (OAS) for the land mine cleanup program that it is coordinating in Central America. "The information of where the mines were was accurate, but what is now inaccurate is the current configuration of the mines."

Officials said that the OAS's hopes of clearing Honduras, Costa Rica and Guatemala of land mines and other unexploded munitions by 2000 and Nicaragua by roughly 2005 — in what would make Central America the first "mine-free" region in the world — have been set back as a result of the worst natural disaster to strike the isthmus in decades.

Mine removal operations in Honduras, where an estimated 2,000 mines remain, have been halted for about three weeks, and only limited work is being conducted in Nicaragua. In the meantime, the program's 27 supervisors and 400 de-mining personnel have been assisting in storm relief efforts.

In Nicaragua, where the army had planted mines to protect key infrastructure, the task of repairing many of the 50 bridges damaged or destroyed by Mitch has been made more difficult due to uncertainty about where the explosives may now be located. "It is hard to do the repair work until emergency de-mining has been done," McDonough said.

In the case of Honduras, most peacetime deaths and injuries have occurred in small, agricultural towns along the Nicaraguan border. Although Honduras had no war of its own, it served as a staging area for U.S.-backed contras in their fight against Nicaragua's Sandinista forces.

Officials involved in a multinational mine removal effort noted that while devices of war continue to kill and injure people long after peace was negotiated, there are other pressing consequences concerning the prevalence of mines. Fear about the devices has discouraged the cultivation of vast areas, hurt economic development, impeded the repatriation of refugees and restricted employment opportunities, observers said.

An Outsider Looking In

Jonathan Yardley

EUDORA
A Writer's Life
By Ann Waldron
Doubleday. 398 pp. $25.95

COMPLETE NOVELS
By Eudora Welty
Edited by Richard Ford and Michael Kreyling
Library of America. 1009 pp. $35

STORIES, ESSAYS & MEMOIR
By Eudora Welty
Edited by Richard Ford and Michael Kreyling
Library of America. 976 pp. $35

EUDORA WELTY was born 89 years ago in Jackson, the capital of Mississippi. Her father was from West Virginia and her mother from Ohio, which made the family something of an oddity in a place that was then astonishingly insular, but they settled into the local community and became both accepted and comfortable.

Welty has lived her entire adult life, with the exception of a few brief forays elsewhere, in her parents' house on a quiet street not far from the center of town; in the sense that her writing has brought her the love and veneration of her townspeople, she is now an insider, but she remains an outsider, the viewpoint from which almost all great American fiction has been written.

Whether Welty herself is in fact a "great" writer has been debated for years. But now, as she becomes the first living writer of fiction to be included in the Library of America, she has received the blessing of the literary establishment.

Simultaneously she has become the subject, albeit the unwilling and uncooperative one, of an unauthorized biography by Ann Waldron, a journalist with a strong interest in Southern literature. Although Welty was unfailingly courteous whenever Waldron approached her, she steadfastly refused to cooperate with the project and urged her friends to do likewise.

Like others whose interest in Welty extends to the woman as well as the writer, Waldron is fixated on the mystery of this elderly spinster's amatory past. She describes in some detail Welty's intimate friendship with a man who turned out to be homosexual, and she redistributes old rumors about Welty's close connection to the British novelist Elizabeth Bowen, who was thought to be bisexual.


Eudora Welty: the only living writer of fiction in the Library of America

None of this speculation serves any useful purpose; Welty, if she is hale enough to read it, can only find it painful and gratuitous, which seems to me the proper response of any other reader.

Otherwise there is little of which to take note in this earnest but pedestrian book whether for praise or condemnation. None of it really matters, though, because as Welty herself knows, the importance of a writer's life pales before that of his or her work unless — as in Hemingway, Mailer, McCullers — the life is bigger than the work. To know Welty is to know her work, so the Library of America volumes offer us all that we need.

Her most accomplished novel seems to me to be The Optimist's Daughter, because — in addition to its many other virtues — it is tightly ordered and never loses sight of where it is going. The novel and its author are far tougher than is generally realized. Over the years there has been a tendency to describe, or dismiss, her as a local colorist of somewhat sentimental hue, and what is called, usually disparagingly, a "women's writer." In fact, as is made plain by the portrait of Fay, Judge McKelva's second wife, she is unsparing in her condemnation of "the great interrelated family of those who never know the meaning of what has happened to them," who, like Fay, are "without any powers of passion or imagination in herself and had no way to see it or reach it in the other person." She has no patience for people who are willfully dense, insensitive to the inner lives of others, unimaginative, slovenly and — no other word will do — stupid.

Reading through her work, all of it good and some of it brilliant, I am struck as much by its toughness as by its more commonly celebrated tenderness. Over the years Welty has written in a variety of styles and settings, usually with humor and always with compassion, but she measures her characters (and by implication her readers) against her own uncommonly high standards. She may be a quiet spinster from Mississippi, but inside she's a rock.

City of Extremes

Joyce A. Ladner

ECOLOGY OF FEAR
Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster
By Mike Davis
Metropolitan. 484 pp. $27.50

IN ECOLOGY OF FEAR Mike Davis, author of the highly acclaimed City Of Quartz, describes Los Angeles as having such an extreme landscape that its residents are taking great risks in order to enjoy the year-round warmth. Davis's thesis is that the city is on a collision course with destruction. He notes that developers have built luxurious estates and high rises on land that sits on top of a major geological fault line. Angelenos largely ignore the forest fires, earthquakes and tornadoes, as well as the threats posed by wild animals including man-eating lions and killer bees.

Even though the forest fires and earthquakes are as predictable as the sunrise, the residents put up multi-million dollar houses that slide down the mountains every few years or are burned in raging and uncontrollable fires. The natural terrain of Santa Monica and other cities in the Los Angeles area is inappropriate for the complex physical infrastructures built upon it. An unfortunate outcome, according to Davis, is that this "building against the grain" is subsidized by the tax dollars of other American citizens through large insurance awards that allow families to rebuild each time a disaster occurs.

This has led to what Davis views as outright class warfare between the haves and have nots, the latter left to suffer the indignities of poverty, police repression, inadequate housing, unemployment and all the other social ills that cause too many minorities to be put in prison and subjected to other forms of social containment. It is the convergence of these two destructive forces — the misuse of the terrain and the poisonous relations between the poor and the nonpoor — that forms the heart of this book.

Yet most of the problems he describes as peculiar to Los Angeles also exist in other parts of the country. The increasing assault on the privacy of the poor — from intrusive questions in welfare offices to cameras in the local equivalents of the 7-Eleven food stores — exists in poor communities throughout the United States. What may be different about Los Angeles is that its climate and natural beauty can mask the wanton destruction of its ecosystem and its ugly race relations.

One interesting feature is Davis's attempt to make sense of the spatial distribution of Los Angeles. He adapts the concentric-circle theory introduced by Ernest W. Burgess, a University of Chicago urban sociologist 70 years ago. Starting downtown, Burgess diagrammed how population density is inversely proportional to wealth. Hence, poor people live in crowded, less attractive housing near downtown, while the wealthy can afford to live in spacious suburban areas.

But other paradigms better explain the spatial hierarchy in our cities today. Burgess's theory cannot account for the sprawl that causes many of the poor to live in the outskirts of some cities. Burgess used five variables in mapping Chicago — concentration, centralization, segregation, invasion and succession — that Davis has adapted to Los Angeles. In addition, he introduces ecological determinants to explain the spatial inequality of Los Angelenos: income, land value, class, race and fear.

According to Davis, fear strikes at the core of all social relations. It defines how the poor and the nonpoor relate to each other; it is also a by-product of intractable poverty and homelessness in the face of tremendous growth and prosperity. Davis says that "as city life grows more feral, the various social milieux adopt security strategies and technologies according to their means. As with Burgess's dart board, the pattern resolves itself into a series of concentric zones with a bull's eye in Downtown. To the extent that these security measures are reactions to urban unrest, it is possible to speak about a 'riot tectonics' that episodically convulses and reshapes urban space."

After the 1992 riots, Los Angeles was reshaped to "contain" the unruly masses. "By flicking a few switches on their command consoles," Davis writes, "the security staffs of the great bank towers were able to cut off all access to their expensive real estate. Bullet-proof steel doors rolled down over street-level entrances, escalators instantly froze, and electronic locks sealed off pedestrian passageways." Will this strategy be confined to Los Angeles, or does it foreshadow what is to come in the rest of the nation? That is the question Davis asks the reader to grapple with.

Reflections in the Silver Screen

Sudip Bose

BEACH BOY
By Ardashir Vakil
Scribner. 239 pp. $22

IN THE hands of a Salman Rushdie or Vikram Seth, the novel resembles a fictional metropolis, its pages teeming with the ideas and politics, comedies and tragedies, crimes and passions of entire generations; no detail of life can be omitted. As Saleem Sinai, Rushdie's narrator in Midnight's Children asks, is this an Indian disease, this urge to encapsulate the whole of reality?

Ardashir Vakil's splendid first novel is something entirely different. To be sure, a booming metropolis looms behind the surface of this book: Bombay, a place where beauty and squalor mingle freely in the salty sea air. But Vakil's art is airy and subtle. His is a quiet book about the inner life of a young boy, a sensuous portrait of restlessness.

Cyrus Readymoney is no ordinary boy. He is a bright and sexually precocious 8-year-old who enjoys eating, skipping school, and spending endless hours at the cinema. His self-absorbed parents live in a glass house on fashionable Juhu Beach. Because they spend their time living the life of high society Cyrus feels ignored and becomes a frustrated wanderer, roaming from one neighbor's house to the next, an interloper in the family affairs of others. When his parents' volatile fights begin to dissolve their marriage, he becomes increasingly dissatisfied with the chaos of his home and envious of the stability of his neighbors' lives.

The one constant in Cyrus's life is food. Vakil fills pages and pages of his novel with tantalizing descriptions of food. "If I went to the Krishnans' at twelve, the [illegible] at [illegible], and the Maharani's at two-thirty, I could manage to have a bite at three houses. I was drifting off on trays of food: mutton korma, thick gravy full of cardamom, poppy seeds, tender slow-cooked meat, mangoes, onion uttapams, cheese toasts with tomato and garlic, shriveled baby brinjals that look like mice, aloo parathas flaky with ghee, mint chutney, cool milky curds . . ." Cyrus's tireless quests signify more than hunger; they represent the longing for emotional stability in his own home life. The endless stream of dishes described above and the ellipsis at the end of the sentence suggest that Cyrus's hunger — for not only food but also for the happiness and order that cannot be found at his home — is insatiable.

All of this wandering about is unsettling; perhaps as a [illegible] addictions. He is a [illegible] daydreaming voyeur spying on a couple's furtive lovemaking on the beach or gazing at his neighbor Meera through the panes of his glass house. But he is also an avowed extrovert who draws attention to himself, makes others laugh, gets into trouble at school. Is it not appropriate, then, that Cyrus lives in a glass house, one in which he can gaze slyly at Meera and the Maharani and be gazed at simultaneously — a house that symbolizes his dual role of voyeur and extrovert?

Early in the novel, while Cyrus awaits the opening credits of a film, he acknowledges "the futility of human endeavor," specifically his idle pursuits, the hours spent waiting for what you want, occupying yourself with activities that [illegible] Cyrus ex[illegible] to little. For the [illegible] understood the meaning of [illegible] time passing, of time wasted, of being left behind by time. Until, of course, the lovely face of the actress, Sharmila Tagore, robbed me of all such morose thoughts." His moment of enlightenment fleeting, he is quickly seduced by other pursuits. But the innocence of boyhood is shattered toward the end of the book, when Cyrus's father suffers a life-threatening heart attack. Cyrus is forced to realize that life is not a fight-sequence in a glittering Hindi movie. Real-life tragedy is painfully palpable. Enough daydreaming and wandering, Vakil seems to be saying by book's end. Enough time wasted. It is time to get on with life.

Le Monde

Russian banking system faces collapse

François Bonnet and Agathe Duparc in Moscow

PAVEL MEDVEDEV, an independent member of the Duma and head of the parliamentary committee on banking, is convinced the Russian banking system is on the verge of collapse. The hour of reckoning struck on November 16, with the end of the 90-day moratorium decided on by the Russian government on August 17, the day it also announced the devaluation of the rouble.

The moratorium allowed Moscow to freeze repayments of its domestic debt in treasury bonds (GKOs), and authorised 1,500 commercial banks not to meet their commitments to foreign creditors on forward foreign currency deals.

On November 12 the Russian central bank took stock of the banking situation. According to its deputy chairman, Andrei Kozlov, some 720 financial establishments will have no choice but to close.

The rest have been divided into three groups. About 600 medium-sized banks should be able to survive without help; a further 190 establishments, chiefly regional banks, will receive 7 billion roubles' worth ($400 million) of aid from the government and local authorities; a further 18 banks, which are regarded as being of strategic importance, will be put back on an even keel at a total cost of 47.5 billion roubles ($2.85 billion).

The Russian government has masterminded this shake-up through the central bank. It has decided on three courses of action. Some banks, such as SBS-Agro, will be nationalised. Banks with a nationwide network will be broken up and regionalised. And new structures will be formed as a result of mergers.

Experts say that up to 50 billion roubles ($3 billion) were already pumped into the system when the government allowed banks to dip into their obligatory reserves, exchanged some of their GKOs for long-term loans, and allowed them to borrow.

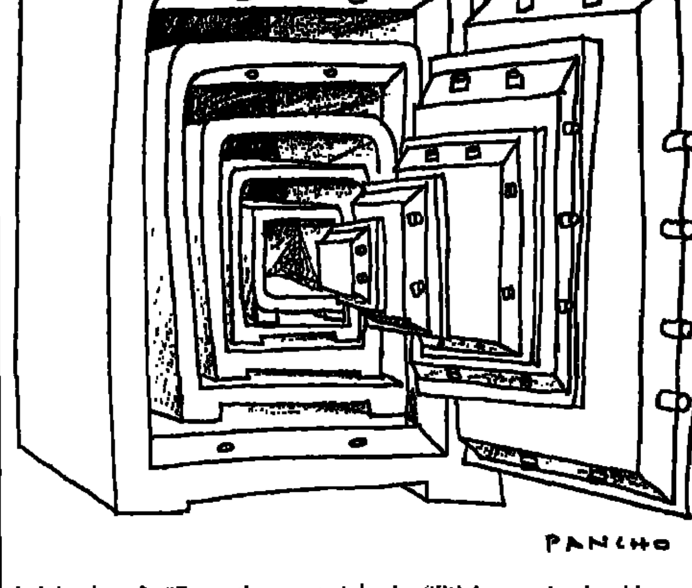
These emergency measures have prevented the pillars of the financial community from collapsing spectacularly, and saved some wealthy oligarchs from ruin. Since August 17 no bank has gone into liquidation. Only three of the 20 leading Russian banks have had their licences withdrawn — Tokobank (which has since recovered it), the Imperial Bank, and Inkombank. The end of the moratorium will force the Russian government to speed up this restructuring process.

Thierry Malleret, an economist with Alfa-Capital, a medium-sized Russian bank, says: "We're going to see an avalanche of proceedings before international arbitration courts. Some French and German banks will be patient, but the investment funds will sue."

The Russian prime minister, Yevgeni Primakov, has suggested that in order to facilitate the settlement of GKOs, foreign establishments should turn the money they are owed into stakes in Russian banks. Negotiations along those lines have been conducted by Deutsche Bank in London, but have not so far been successful.

In the long term, however, industrial assets — in oil, gas and metals — held by a number of Russian financiers could prove attractive to certain Western companies.

The main problem is the repayment of forward deals in dollars contracted with foreign establishments. "Those contracts enabled us to cover ourselves on transactions in roubles by lending dollars at the same time," says a Western banker. Such contracts are now believed to total $6-$8 billion.



What, then, is the overall level of indebtedness? "Even the central bank doesn't know the figures," says Medvedev. According to a Russian banker, "they're all trying to keep their heads above water while secretly negotiating with ministers or the central bank".

Any assessment of the situation is made particularly difficult by rampant fraud. Investigations have started into the activity of Inkombank, whose portfolio of assets is believed to have shrunk by $1.5 billion within a month. The Imperial Bank is also being investigated. According to several experts, $4 billion was transferred abroad between August 17 and the end of September, mainly via bogus import contracts.

No one knows which banks will be rescued. "It's impossible to explain anything rationally, because political influence and personal relationships play an important role," Medvedev says.

There seems to be no explanation why SBS-Agro, a bank with one of the highest levels of foreign debt ($1 billion), should be rescued by nationalisation, while Inkombank, the bank with the second-largest volume of private customers' deposits, has been allowed to go to the wall. "The criteria are purely political," says a Western analyst.

Private customers are the other great losers in this crisis. In September the Russian government suggested to the customers of six leading banks that they should transfer their foreign currency accounts to the Sberbank (savings bank) by October 12 and change those holdings into roubles.

On November 11 Primakov announced that the Russian state was no longer in a position to underwrite accounts in banking establishments not on the list of survivors. The 720 banks singled out for closure hold one third of all private customers' deposits.

(November 18)

Traders beat a path to the door of UN-sanctioned Iraq

Gilles Paris in Baghdad

IRAQ'S recent stand-off with the United Nations came at a time when Baghdad was holding its international fair, an event that reflects mounting world interest in Iraq as a trading partner. A Western observer noted that this year the fair was attended by new countries, and that others had doubled the size of their stands.

Iraq, which has the second-largest oil reserves in the world, represents a substantial market of 22 million inhabitants. After eight years of sanctions, the country will more or less have to go back to square one.

For the time being, trading links are still governed by political considerations. Deals falling within the framework of the "oil-for-food" resolution, which remains Iraq's main source of revenue (apart from the smuggling of oil products, particularly via the Gulf), have been made chiefly with permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Over the first four phases of the resolution's application, which authorised the sale of $2 billion worth of oil every six months (that figure was raised to $5.2 billion a few months ago), France emerges as Iraq's main trading partner, with a market share of 15-16 per cent.


An Iraqi soldier on alert during the recent UN stand-off

That figure puts France ahead of Russia and China, which started muscling in only during the third and fourth phases of the resolution's application. The first two phases tended to favour leading cereal-producing nations such as the United States and Australia.

France's overall volume of deals contracted within the framework of the oil-for-food agreement amounted to $920 million at the end of phase four. That rather high figure shows that Iraq already enjoys a rather healthy ranking compared with France's other Middle East customers.

But it also fuels accusations that France is interested only in making a fast buck — accusations that Washington levelled at Paris during previous stand-offs with Baghdad, when France was trying to play the role of moderator.

Yet political factors do not explain everything. The long-standing nature of trading relations should also be taken into account. There is now the possibility that France's exports to Iraq will include contracts with a higher added value than before (railway and electrical equipment, telecommunications) which could, once the long process of authorisation has been completed, notably by the UN Committee on Sanctions, involve industrial giants such as Alstom, which has long been established in Iraq.

In the past few months it has been confirmed that Iraq's Arab trading partners, especially Egypt, are increasing their share of the UN-proscribed trade quota. Here again, political considerations have shaped the Iraqis' attitude: they are trying to restore ties with their neighbours, many of whom suffered as a result of the Gulf war.

When Egypt came out in support of the US-led coalition, Egyptian immigrant workers were unceremoniously flung out of Iraq. And until last year, when Iraq began making timid overtures to Syria, there had been no diplomatic relations between the two countries for 20 years. Arab suppliers have now cornered an overall market share of 20 per cent of all deals made under the oil-for-food arrangement.

Another form of normalisation that has got under way since last summer is the gradual resumption of pilgrimages to holy Shia sites such as An Najaf and Kerbela, where the tombs of Ali and Hussein (the Prophet's son-in-law and grandson respectively) are located. This trend has chiefly benefited the hotel sector, which thrives on a daily influx of about 2,000 pilgrims, most of them Asian. A foreign diplomat based in Baghdad reckons that each pilgrim brings in $500 to Iraq — no mean sum, given the state the country is in.

(November 18)

Belgian left divided on Vlaams Blok

Luc Rosenzweig in Brussels

WITH a general election only seven months away, Belgium's main political parties, both Dutch-speaking and French-speaking alike, cannot agree on how to deal with Vlaams Blok, the far-right, xenophobic and separatist party in Flanders.

Their differences came out into the open when Vlaams Blok held its party conference in Brussels on November 8. The Liberal burgomaster of Brussels Capital Region, François-Xavier de Donnea, banned the conference on the grounds that several groups intended to stage an anti-Vlaams Blok demonstration.

That ban was immediately lifted by the interior minister, Luc van den Bossche, who is a member of the Flemish (Dutch-speaking) Socialist party (SP). He ordered the governor of Brussels to ensure the conference was held under police protection.

The governor is Raymonde Dury, a former MEP and a member of the Walloon (French-speaking) Socialist party (PS), who is married to Jean-Pierre Cot, a French Socialist and vice-president of the European Parliament.

Dury knuckled under, but announced her resignation four days later, not without taking a swipe at her administrative superior: "I tried, against my will and convictions, to perform a loyal role as a cog in the workings of the state. But I have been duped and treated with a great deal of hypocrisy."

This clash within the Socialist family prompted the presidents of the Walloon and Flemish sister parties, Philippe Busquin and Fred Erdman respectively, to fix a meeting in the near future to decide on a joint approach to the problem of dealing with Vlaams Blok. This will be no easy matter, as the SP, many of whose working-class voters have Vlaams Blok sympathies, tends to exploit nationalistic feelings.

The whole incident illustrates the difficulties facing the democratic parties, both in government and in opposition, in trying to stem mounting support for Vlaams Blok, which has radically changed the traditional political lie of the land since the beginning of the nineties.

Vlaams Blok got 7.8 per cent of the national vote at the last general election in 1995, and 12.4 per cent in Flanders. It did best of all in cities such as Antwerp and Mechelen, where it topped 20 per cent.

Breaches have appeared in the *cordon sanitaire* set up by the other parties in the hope of isolating Vlaams Blok, a movement that advocates separatism and whose rallying cry is "Belgie, barst!" ("Burst, Belgium!").

A bill aimed at stopping public money going to parties with a racist and xenophobic platform has also caused a split within the ruling coalition of Walloon and Flemish Social Christians and Socialists. Although vigorously supported by the Walloon PS, the bill has not been welcomed by the CVP, which believes it is not an effective way of countering Vlaams Blok.

(November 19)

China gives lessons in birth control

Francis Deron in Beijing

HALF a dozen young couples watched their teacher intently: the young woman was wearing a pinafore on which her breasts, ovaries, uterus and genitals had been crudely drawn. It must have been a disconcerting experience for them — people in the fairly affluent agricultural province of Zhejing, in eastern China, tend to be extremely prudish.

The group was attending an introductory course in sex education and contraception — something which would have been quite unthinkable in China not so long ago.

Their teacher spends half a day per month in each of the villages assigned to her. During the "lessons", she tells newly-weds and courting couples about the basic facts of birth control, which are a mystery to many in a country characterised by traditional peasant modesty and communist prudishness.

Our teacher, who was trained as a doctor, typifies the authorities' determination to educate people, even at the risk of shocking them. For the first time in China, reproduction is being approached not from a purely medical angle, but in conjunction with couples' married lives.

The new sex education campaign, which is still only at an experimental stage, is a welcome departure from China's existing birth-control policy, which has been heavily criticised internationally for being compulsory and too radical. The aim remains the same: to stabilise the population at 1.6 billion by 2050, and then to start bringing it down.

The new approach is more humane, and consequently its originators expect it to be more effective. The hope is that birth control — having had limited success under a totalitarian, and then an authoritarian, government — will become a voluntary act that has the backing of the whole community.

Less than a generation ago, China's family planning authorities believed that only drastic methods could curb the population explosion. These included compulsory abortion until very late in pregnancy, and strong pressure on couples to get sterilised.

The regime introduced such drastic measures because it was desperate to undo the damage caused by Mao Zedong's campaign to expand China's population. When the People's Republic came into being, the Chinese numbered 500 million. Mao encouraged them to double their numbers so as to be able to survive a nuclear attack by the United States or the Soviet Union.



Growing fast: China's population will still be expanding when these boys reach retirement age

A one-child-per-family policy was later implemented to control the numbers. Curiously, the authorities now deny such policy ever existed. Yet their new approach is a direct result of that policy's failure.

It is officially recognised that a mere 20 per cent of married couples of child-bearing age have only one child. They are mostly found in cities, where cramped conditions and higher living standards have made larger families less desirable. Elsewhere, favouritism has enabled those who can afford it to offer themselves the luxury of at least two, if not three, children.

It is among higher earners that China is pioneering its new policy of voluntary birth control. In half a dozen urban districts pilot programmes, offering advice, along with contraception and abortion clinics, have been set up by government to gauge the success of the voluntary approach. The emphasis is on "informed choice" rather than compulsion; and where there is compulsion, the authorities dress it up as something else.

A couple in Shanghai, for example, must pay the equivalent of three years' salary if they have a second child. This is no longer called a "fine", but instead a "contribution" to social good works.

This new approach naturally enshrines a form of social inequality as far as the right to have children is concerned. But it has the advantage, in the eyes of the authorities, of being more acceptable to foreign, and particularly American, conservatives, who the government believes have blocked international aid to help fight overpopulation.

This courting of approval from abroad is new. China is well-known for fiercely opposing any "interference" from outsiders, yet it now seems prepared to work with foreign NGOs that advocate a more flexible approach to birth control. These include Partners in Population and Development, and the Rockefeller Foundation.

China has also said it is prepared to take its cue from other countries, such as Thailand, where family planning has succeeded in painlessly stabilising population growth at the acceptable level of 1.1 per cent (in a country of 60 million inhabitants).

With its higher population growth of 1.9 per cent, China is virtually at the same stage reached by Thailand when Mao died in 1976. According to official figures, 65,000 babies are now born in China every day. This means that, even in the best scenario, the world's most populous country will spend most of the 21st century trying to undo Chairman Mao's monumental mistake.

(November 7)

European greens taunt their red allies

Ariane Chemin and Gérard Courtois

DANIEL Cohn-Bendit likes being provocative; Robert Hue does not. Both men will lead their parties into the June 1999 European elections. The difference is that "Danny", the Green, will do so enthusiastically; while Hue, the Communist, won't.

The reason is that Cohn-Bendit, hero of the May 1968 events and now a German MEP, is riding high again, thanks to the success of his friends, the *Grünen*, in the recent German elections. Hue, on the other hand, is haunted by the thought of being sidelined, and his Green opponent has hardly proved a comfort.

Last August, when he was making his bid to lead the Greens at the 1999 elections, Cohn-Bendit launched a multi-pronged attack on the French Communist party (PC). In Le Monde, he drew a distinction between those who believe in speeding up the construction of Europe (such as himself) and the "nationalists, Gaullists and Communists" who do not.

In Le Figaro, he said: "I do not agree with the governing pluralist left, and especially not with the Communist party, [on] nuclear power, drugs and hunting." He went further in Le Journal du Dimanche: "On many issues . . . there is no difference between Philippe Séguin [leader of the neo-Gaullist RPR], Robert Hue and the Socialist party. That was demonstrated by the vote on hunting [which extended the shooting season]."

But his hardest-hitting attack came in the weekly L'Evènement du Jeudi in early September: "The European elections will give people the chance to vote with their hearts, to vote for ideas . . . We could overtake the PC and become the second-largest contingent" on the left.

Similarly candid comments by Jean-Luc Bennahmias, national secretary of the Greens, had earlier earned him a rap over the knuckles; Cohn-Bendit's remarks were tantamount to blasphemy.

The environment minister, Dominique Voynet, herself a Green, lost her cool and told Cohn-Bendit he should stop jeopardising prime minister Lionel Jospin's finely-tuned coalition. It took longer for the Communists and the Socialists to react: naming your opponents can give them credibility.

But eventually Hue was persuaded to respond; perhaps because he had heard the results of the latest opinion poll, which showed the Communists running neck and neck with the Greens. On October 26 he appeared on the Europe 1 radio station, claiming that Cohn-Bendit had "an almost neo-liberal stance on Europe". By calling for an end to nuclear energy, he shrilled, the anachronistic Greens were obviously in favour of a "return to the oil lamp".

The attacks have since ceased — in fact, Cohn-Bendit and Hue have a lunch date scheduled for November 30. Only Cohn-Bendit's fellow Green, Noël Mamère, who wrested control from the Communists, of the town council of Bègles in south-west France and has bad memories of the campaign, has continued to fire the occasional barb at Hue.

But, as if to prove that you cannot get away with attacking a bigger fish than yourself, the PC's national bureau decided not to send any prominent Communist delegate to the Greens' party conference at Noisy-le-Grand near Paris last week.

(November 15-16)

GUARDIAN WEEKLY November 29 1998

Washington fails to lead by example

EDITORIAL

THE future of the world was at stake at the recent Buenos Aires Earth summit. The countries attending the conference had been asked to implement practical and immediate solutions to prevent global warming, which scientists now agree is seriously damaging our environment.

But all the delegates managed to do was draw up a list of issues that would be addressed at future meetings. In other words, the conference was a failure.

It is true that the three main groups — the developing countries, Europe and the United States — had widely differing objectives. But Washington's determination to protect its own interests, irrespective of the cost to the environment, was the main cause of the fudge.

It is worth noting that while the US makes no attempt to lead the world in finding a solution to global warming, it nevertheless insists on representing the international community when dealing with Iraq.

Similarly, while the US representative, and many other delegates, spoke of their concerns about the devastation caused by Hurricane Mitch in Central America, these sentiments seemed not to inform their discussions about dealing with the very cause of that devastation.

While the Clinton administration harps on about the climatic "challenge", the US — which as the biggest producer of greenhouse gases is largely responsible for creating that challenge in the first place — has shown itself incapable of even beginning to address the problem. This is something developing countries find particularly galling since the US repeatedly tells them to reduce their own emissions.

This from a country that only this month signed the Kyoto Protocol of December 1997, in which it pledged to reduce by 2010 its emissions by 7 per cent compared with 1990 levels. To crown it all, as it was signing the Kyoto Protocol — 10 months late — it tried to use the Buenos Aires summit to get those reductions shifted beyond its borders. The American delegation proposed that the rules of the free market should be extended to trading in greenhouse gases: they were keen to be allowed to buy their right to emit gases from poorer countries with little or no industry.

The US's attitude is clearly preventing any progress in the fight against climate change. It is also sapping the legitimacy of a power that claims to act in an ethical manner. Promises are made to be kept, not broken.

(November 15-16)

GUARDIAN WEEKLY November 29 1998

Hurricane Mitch was a disaster for ordinary Hondurans but big business is doing fine, reports John Vidal

Built on bananas

THE RAINS have stopped, the rivers are subsiding and post-disaster reality is dawning for Maria Deraz Martinez. The 34-year-old former banana plantation worker now lives with her five children in a plastic shelter on the dual carriageway between La Lima and the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa.

Her outlook is grim. To her right, swirling below the breached flood defences, is the river Chamelicon. Three weeks ago it tore through La Lima, flooded an area of more than 250 square kilometres and destroyed Maria's home, along with several thousand others.

To her left are the vast banana plantations of the Tela Railroad Company, a subsidiary of Chiquita, the world's largest banana firm. Their 7,000 hectares of crops are wasted; so too, they say, are their sorting houses, railways, refrigeration plants, their workers' villages and the docks.

Maria, one of the 42,000 people directly dependent on Chiquita's operation in La Lima, faces further economic marginalisation, if not destitution. Not only has she lost everything, but Chiquita has also laid her off, offering only to pay a month's "bonus" and her salary of about $5 a day for two weeks. The company has offered her and its other workers their surplus land to farm and a loan to live on until the plantations are producing again. Neither is welcome: "I am not a farmer and I cannot afford to borrow but I have no option," she says.

The prospect for Chiquita, which meanwhile would have to pay about $10 million to keep its 7,300 workers on full pay until the new crops are producing, is rosy. The company, says Jimmy Zonta Sing, its Costa Rican spokesman, will rebuild its infrastructure on insurance money and sees this as "an opportunity" to invest in new plant, and increase global competitiveness.

While Chiquita is publicly "distraught" at what has happened in the country, Zonta Sing avoids answering questions about the company's responsibility to help the reconstruction of Honduras. "We have been acting with profound social responsibility . . . but where is your focus? Is it your own self or your neighbours? It is so hard."

City analysts say banana prices will rise, and Chiquita, which draws on several countries for its produce, will barely see a dent in its annual profits. It exports more than 122 million boxes of bananas a year from Central America, 40 million of which are from Honduras.

Maria has few people working in her immediate interests. No aid has reached her, even if emergency rations are being given out in nearby towns and Chiquita is setting up kitchens. She says she is glad to see the relief planes flying overhead, because it means that "Honduras has friends and people will be helped".



Three men 'save' some bananas from the floods PHOTO: MAS

Chiquita also has friends in high places. It is one of the larger corporate sponsors of the Democratic party in the United States and has the US government working in its legal interests at the World Trade Organisation. It would be the main beneficiary should the US win the "banana war" now escalating between the US and Europe. It and the other giant US-owned banana companies in Central America want equal access to European markets, which currently protect small farmers in the Caribbean islands, but the European Union is blocking access, to the anger of the US government.

As the most powerful company in Honduras, Chiquita has a history of making presidents and dictators. Last year the company paid only $3 million in local taxes on a turnover of hundreds of millions of dollars, and contributed little in foreign exchange earnings.

While the president talks about building a "new Honduras" based on "equality", it is hard to see how better education, sanitation, clean water, health care or housing will reach Maria and the country's 1.2 million *damnificados* without the removal of the massive foreign debt. Last year this stood at more than $4 billion. Foreign aid to Honduras was nearly $400 million, but it spent $264 million in debt servicing.

"It is immoral," says Kevin Watkins of Oxfam. "Reconstruction will take many years. It will be impossible unless there is debt relief."

Back on the main road, Maria knows that the task of rebuilding Honduras will largely be left to people like her. "We will start again," she says. "What else can we do?"

A glimmer of hope from the climate talks

Paul Brown in Buenos Aires

THE urge to make money has become the driving force behind action on climate change. Multinationals have been falling over each other to trade carbon quotas, and have left the politicians behind. Environmentalists and the developing world are deeply sceptical of the multinationals' motives. But in order to gain carbon credits to buy and sell, these companies will need to take action to help the climate.

The most promising system being developed is the "clean development mechanism", which encourages new technology to be transferred to developing countries. One such example is a hydro-power scheme being built in Bhutan by a Dutch company. The resultant "saving" of 25,000 tonnes of carbon becomes a paper commodity that can be traded between countries.

Another scheme is a wind farm the United States is building in Costa Rica. It will provide 30,000 tonnes of carbon saving over 30 years. The carbon credit will go to the country that provided the technology.

Developing countries remain suspicious, but they are keen on the idea of leapfrogging over the dirty technologies of the Western industrial revolution.

Everyone agrees that the climate talks have been a mess from the word go, but out of the shambles there may be a glimmer of hope.



Memisa is a major Dutch organisation involved in the professional promotion of (primary) health care in developing countries. Memisa is looking for candidates for the position of:

Management Controller (MC) - vacancy no. PA98MOZOO1

For the field-office in Nampula, Mozambique, Memisa is searching for a MC. The PHC programme, which is being executed in cooperation with the provincial health authorities in the province of Nampula, exists of rehabilitation of the health-infrastructure and training of health workers. The MC is responsible for the management of financial-administrative and logistical support and is working in dose co-operation with the local health-authorities. The MC is managing the field-office and is responsible for yearly budgeting, bi-annual financial and narrative reporting. The MC will check and adjust the existing management procedures and systems following current developments and supervise automation of stocks-control and has regular contacts with and is responsible to the Memisa head office in Rotterdam.

You have a higher (tertiary) or academic degree with a vast experience in comparable positions preferably in developing countries. Communication on different levels, diplomacy, team spirit and (if required) firm action on management level are important for this position. Command of the Portuguese language would be preferable. You are available for a minimum of 2 years.

Gross salary is max. NLG 7.069,-p/m depending on age and experience.

Information related to this position is available with Johanna Durrer, Personnel Officer for Mozambique. Wednesday, Thursday and Friday from 10 - 11 am.

Administrator - vacancy no. PN98RDC003

The administrator is responsible for the establishment of the financial administration and the accounting department of APAMESK, a young pharmaceutical store in Bukavu, Eastern RDCongo. Other responsibilities are the establishment and maintenance of the project administration, financial reporting to the Executive Director of APAMESK and Memisa, the training of the local administrative staff. The administrator will also assist the Executive Director in the establishment of accounting, administrative and stock keeping systems.

The administrator has a higher (tertiary) or academic degree in the field of business administration, and a minimum of two years of experience in comparable positions, preferably in a relief context in developing countries (pref. francophone). Good knowledge of the French language is requested. Experience in working with the software programme Exact is preferable.

You are available for a minimum of 1 year.

Gross salary is max. NLG 7.069,-p/m depending on age and experience. DRC is considered unfit for dependents.

Programme Coordinator (PC) - vacancy no. PN98RWA010

The PC is responsible for the Memisa programmes in the health districts of Kilinda, Remera-Rukoma and Mibilizi, Rwanda. This enhances responsibility for all external contacts (representatives government authorities, local partners, donors, other NGO's, etc.), coordination, implementation and monitoring of the programme activities, project identification, reporting (narrative and financial) to Memisa head-office and donors, supervision of expatriate and local staff and security matters.

The PC has a higher (tertiary) or academic degree in the field of socio—economics, and a minimum of three years of experience in comparable positions in a relief context. Good knowledge of the English and French language is requested. Experience in working with different software programmes is preferable. You are available for a minimum of 1 year.

Gross salary is max. NLG 7.069,-p/m depending on age and experience.

Information on all vacancies is available at the Memisa Office, Overseas Personnel Services, Ms. B. Yzer, except for Fridays. Only EU recognised certificates can be considered. According to experience and age, specific bonuses can be added to the mentioned salaries.

Written applications with extensive CV for this vacancy can be directed within 3 weeks after publication to: Memisa Overseas Personnel Services, P.O. Box 61, 3000 AB Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Tel. 00-31-10-2064646; fax 00-31-10-2064647; E-mail: recruit@memisa.nl The first selection of all positions will take place in week 51.

The Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund

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The Fund wishes to establish a pool of assessors, who will be used on an ad-hoc basis. Applicants need to:

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- be currently working in one of the sectors, or have recently worked in a relevant organisation
- have experience of assessing and monitoring projects
- be able to work to tight deadlines
- understand equal opportunities and related issues
- be willing to travel (within UK)

Please send a CV with two referees and a covering letter outlining your assessment and monitoring experience and availability to: Grants Manager, The Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund, The County Hall, Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7PB.

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Director



Applications are invited from Commonwealth citizens for the position of Director of the Commonwealth Foundation. Salary for UK residents/British nationals: £68,981 gross (including UK Benefits Allowance and subject to 'internal' income tax); for overseas recruits/non-British nationals: £52,848 free of tax (including Expatriation Allowance) plus other allowances. Initial contract: 2-3 years, renewable.

The Commonwealth Foundation is a London based inter-governmental organisation that supports capacity building and skill sharing within the non-governmental (NGO) sector of the Commonwealth. It also provides grants and undertakes programmatic activities in the areas of professional development and exchange, and the arts and culture.

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Candidates must be able to demonstrate:

- insight into Commonwealth and international development issues, and commitment to the People's Commonwealth;
- a strong track record in organisational management and strategy development;
- excellent communication and diplomatic skills;
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For an information pack, please telephone +44 (0) 171 930 6014, fax +44 (0) 171 839 8157, or e-mail: jeffreyd@commonwealth.int
Note: shortlisted candidates only will be contacted by 31 March 1999.

Closing date: 15 January 1999.



SOS Sahel International (UK)

Project Manager, Ethiopia
(Collaborative Forest Management)

SOS Sahel has been working in Ethiopia since 1989, with a focus on sustainable community management of local resources. A project is now being established in Borana, Oromiya Region, to establish joint management strategies for the sustainable use of natural juniper forests.

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The minimum requirements for the post are: four years related work experience in Africa; relevant degree and technical qualification; proven experience of financial and personnel management; a participatory management style; computer and administrative skills. The post requires a strong understanding of Collaborative Forest Management and conflict resolution.

The Project Manager will be based in Borana, reporting to the Director in Addis. Facilities are basic and communications difficult, willingness to live in a rural environment is therefore essential. Competitive package dependent upon skills and experience.

Please send by 31st December your CV, and a covering letter explaining why you feel you are suited to the post, to SOS Sahel, 1 Tolpuddle Street, London N1 OXT. Fax: (+44 171) 837 0856, E-mail: sossaheluk@gn.apc.org attachments in Word 6 for Windows 3.1. Please include a contact number

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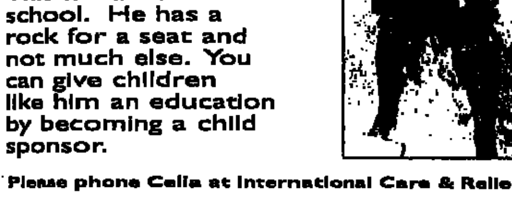
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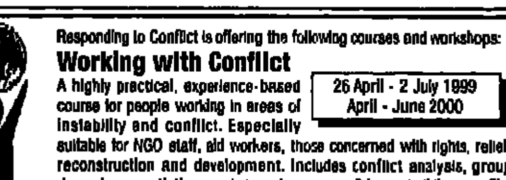
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RTC, Selly Oak Colleges (G), 1046 Bristol Road, Birmingham B29 6LJ, UK.
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The Government of Pakistan's (GoP) Social Action Programme (SAP) aims to improve Pakistan's public sector social services, with a focus on quality and access, particularly for females and the poor. In collaboration with the World Bank (WB) and other donors, DFID is supporting it through the Social Action Programme Project (SAPP), and through related sectoral projects in health and population, education, and possible rural water supply and sanitation.

PAKISTAN
CO-ORDINATOR
SOCIAL ACTION PROGRAMME PROJECT

DFID joined the SAPP donor consortium in 1994. Other consortium donor members include the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Netherlands Government and the European Commission. A Multi-donor Support Unit (MSU) based in Islamabad, helps to co-ordinate SAPP management and inputs from SAPP donors. As DFID SAPP Co-ordinator, you will be a key player in the management and development of the donor side of the SAP partnership, working particularly closely with the WB Social Sector Team Leader, who leads the donor consortium.

Specifically, you will oversee effective co-ordination of DFID support to, and strategic guidance on, SAP through the SAPP and related inputs. This will include developing and maintaining knowledge and understanding of the SAP and overall social sector service provision, and co-ordinating and leading DFID representation in SAP-related discussions with the Government of Pakistan at all levels. In addition, you will monitor and regularly review the progress of DFID inputs into SAPP, and take lead responsibility for the preparation of a Mid Term Review and Project Completion reports. Co-ordinating inputs and participation of other DFID staff and consultancy personnel will also fall within your remit as will preparing terms of reference in consultation with DFID advisers.

QUALIFICATIONS

You should have sound analytical, presentational and interpersonal skills coupled with the ability to work on your own and as a leader and team member. Proven competence in the management of social, developmental and institutional issues at the strategic and policy level in a developing country, preferably in South Asia is pre-requisite. Experience of facilitating and supporting professional personnel from a range of disciplines is essential.

Experience of public sector management in one or more of the social sectors, together with an understanding of change management, will be required. An appreciation of the processes involved in decentralisation, public/private partnerships, quality assurance and community participation would be advantageous.

Ideally, you will have some familiarity with DFID and its internal procedures. Experience of working overseas, particularly in South Asia and as a member of a multi-disciplinary team, would be an advantage.

Applicants should either be nationals of Member States of the European Economic Area (EEA), or Commonwealth citizens who have an established right of abode and the right to work in the United Kingdom

TERMS OF APPOINTMENTS

Based in Islamabad, you will be on contract to the British Government for 3 years in service to the Government of Pakistan. Salary will be within the range £43,000-£46,000 p.a (UK taxable) commensurate with qualifications and experience. Additional benefits will normally include variable tax-free allowances, children's education allowances, free accommodation and passages.

Closing date for receipt of completed applications is 18 December 1998.

For further details and application form, please write to Appointments Officer, Ref No AH304/3/MS/2/TG, Abercrombie House, Eaglesham Road, East Kilbride, Glasgow G75 8EA, stating Ref No AH304/3/MS/2 clearly on your envelope, or telephone 01355 843138.

DFID is committed to a policy of equal opportunities and applications for this post are sought from both men and women.

DFID Department for International Development

PROJECT CO-ORDINATOR
Nigeria




WaterAid works through local partnerships to manage a range of water, sanitation and hygiene education programmes. In Nigeria we are supporting two local government water and sanitation units in the Benue State.

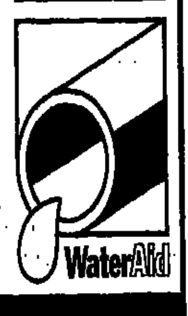
Reporting to the Country Representative you will work closely with local government and WaterAid staff, coordinating, monitoring and assessing the project. Supporting the project staff in the development of appropriate strategies you will work towards the long-term sustainability of the programme.

A talented project manager you will have at least two years' overseas experience – ideally gained in the community based social development field. A knowledge of the issues around water and sanitation would be particularly useful. The ability to work in a small team in a remote area is essential.

For an application pack, please send a SAE with stamps to the value of 40p to Jacqui Spradbery, WaterAid, Prince Consort Hse, 27-29 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UB, or e-mail: jacquispradbery@wateraid.org.uk. Closing date: 18 December 1998. Interviews w/c 4 Jan 1999. (No telephone calls please.)

WaterAid is an independent charity working with people in developing countries to improve their quality of life through lasting improvements to water, sanitation and hygiene using local skills and practical technologies.

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Microsoft is at war with its own government over unfair trading but, as **Victor Keegan** reports, the real threat to its future lies closer to home

Reality check required

IT'S lunchtime in the spacious galleried restaurant. The place is alive with millionaires — though you would never guess from their casual attire and deceptively relaxed demeanour.

We are at the Seattle headquarters of Microsoft, the most aggressively successful company in the world, and it's all feeling a bit unreal. It is hard to believe that in these pastoral surroundings more wealth is produced here than anywhere else on the planet. And all from a single product combining trillions of ones and zeros of binary code into spreadsheets, operating systems and the like; for instance, each copy of the forthcoming Windows 2000 will contain 60 million lines of code.

To some, Microsoft — under investigation by the Department of Justice — is still the Evil Empire, threatening rivals and gobbling up potential competitors to protect its 90 per cent global armlock on PC operating systems. To others, including most Americans and everyone on the Redmond campus in Seattle, Microsoft is still the American Dream of hard graft and dizzy rewards made flesh.

The company has been expanding, seemingly unstoppably, for two decades. This year the price of its shares has, unexpectedly, almost doubled to $110, bringing the personal stake of chairman Bill Gates (pictured left) to $62.1 billion. The rampaging stock price has made many of its 28,000 employees into millionaires through a generous stock option scheme.

But behind the deceptive campus calm, potentially seismic changes are taking place. Serious questions are being asked, inside as well as outside the company, about whether this steamrolling profit machine — with $17.2 billion cash in the bank — is about to go into reverse gear.

None of these worries were obvious at the recent annual meeting of Microsoft in the Bellevue suburb of Seattle. Gates and his board were given an ovation as they entered and another when the meeting finished. Microsoft must be the only company in the world where directors (and not just Gates) are besieged by shareholders asking for autographs. Gates was even asked to autograph money, presumably in the hope that Dollar Bills will be worth more in time than dollar bills.

Microsoft is changing on several fronts. Most immediately, the American Dream is at war with its own government over alleged abuses of its monopoly power over a whole range of business practices. Gates (and everyone I met on the Redmond campus) vehemently resists all of these charges and promises to refute them blow-by-blow when Microsoft has its turn in court.

Gates had better be right because the alternative could be the puncturing of what others see as Microsoft's corporate pride and the eventual humbling of this supremely self-confident company, one that acts as if its motto is "What's Good for Microsoft is Good for America". Maybe it is. But Microsoft may not need the justice department to cut it down to size.

Top management is worried that the virtuous circle of recent years that has propelled the company ever upwards could soon turn into a downward spin.

Greg Maffei, chief financial officer, flashes a battery of slides on the wall to show how past success was driven by 30 per cent annual revenue increases and falling costs (down from 16.9 per cent in 1993 to only 8.3 per cent last year). This produced high profit margins leading to a soaring share price that hugely boosted the value of incentives (through stock options), making Microsoft the place where motivated movers wanted to be.

Now, he argues, turnover will slacken because sales of PCs — on which the Windows operating system depends — are reaching saturation point, while the main reason for the recent decline in the cost of goods sold (the switch from floppy disks to CD-ROMs for distribution) has run its course. The cash benefit from the fall in costs has been used to finance research and development — running at a very impressive $3 billion for the 1999 fiscal year (31 per cent up on last year). If Microsoft's revenue growth slackens while costs rise it will be caught in a double squeeze. Any fall in its stock value will make it much more difficult to attract bright new recruits — so the company will have to pay higher salaries instead, adding more to its cost base and threatening R&D spending upon which long-term growth depends. At present, according to Maffei, most recruits take a pay cut when they join because of the future attraction of share options.

Another cultural change is that employees — the famous Microserfs — aren't quite the workaholics they once were. The barometer of this is the company car park. Mike Murray, vice president human resources, claims there are lots more spare parking lots at 6.45pm than there used to be seven or eight years ago. Why? Employees are no longer single. They are getting older (average age now 33) and more than half are now married, including Gates himself.

Microsoft's Redmond campus, driven by the scent of stock options

Microsoft still keeps a tight grip on its golden geese, a 90 per cent market share not only of computer operating systems but of the two leading software packages that run on them — the Word word processor and the Excel spreadsheet. Refusing to make the same mistake as IBM, which took its eye off the ball when under government investigation, Microsoft is using part of its huge cash reserves to move into all of the avenues opened up by the information revolution, with a devouring ambition to dominate them all. Mostly it buys small companies in order to develop them. Corporate policy to "embrace and extend" has led the company into HotMail (the free e-mail start-up), Web-TV, cable TV, wireless telephony, speech recognition, video transmission, electronic payments and so on.

The most resounding impression gathered from Redmond is the absolute refusal — bordering on inability — even to admit that Microsoft is in a monopoly position, let alone whether it is exploiting it against the public interest. Microsoft's president, Steve Ballmer, emphatically denies that the company has done anything wrong or that it might even change its spots as a result of the DoJ's inquiry. Ballmer insists that Microsoft has behaved with propriety "100 per cent at all times". Not 95 per cent, nor even 90 per cent as lesser mortals might grudgingly admit.

Notwithstanding its oft-repeated cry that its position in the market place is fragile, Microsoft has a self-confidence that borders on hubris.

And, as in Greek — not to mention geek — tragedies, that is what eventually might bring it down if the justice department doesn't do it first. Microsoft has nothing to fear except perhaps . . . itself.

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The Guardian Weekly

CHRISTMAS GIFTS

Alistair Cooke turned 90 last week. **Alan Rusbridger** hears how his glittering career was launched by the Manchester Guardian in 1929

Voice of America

IT WAS ONLY a minor notice: a review of a travelling production of a "tragical comedy", Jew Suss, at Blackpool's Opera House at the end of July 1929. The initials at the bottom — AC — were the only clue to the authorship of the review. Peggy Ashcroft was pleased with the praise for her performance. The lead actor, Manley Matheson Lang, was less pleased and tried to discover who on earth AC was.

He failed. In fact the critic was on stage beside him, playing a minor role. He was called Alfred Cooke, Salford born and Blackpool bred, and this was his first piece for the Manchester Guardian.

It was, of course, unconventional for an actor to be reviewing a performance in which he was involved. But then little about the long life of Alfred (later Alistair) Cooke has been conventional. On Friday last week he celebrated his 90th birthday, one of only two nonagenarians with his own radio show and the only broadcaster to have had one that has lasted more than 50 years (52, to date). It has been an extraordinary life in which he got to know every United States president from Roosevelt to Nixon: but it all started with that notice in the "MG" in 1929.

Cooke is, of course, frailer these days. But his eye is as beady as ever and his mind astonishingly agile and fresh. I went to see him earlier this year to record his memories of working for the Guardian. In his legendary, rent-controlled Upper East side flat, he poured two large tumblers of whisky and talked for an hour, name perfect and date perfect.

He began with the account of his first MG piece. "I came from a Manchester Guardian reading family. My father was a Manchester liberal and a Methodist preacher, a very gentle, sweet, totally trusting man.

"I went to school in Blackpool, a secondary grammar. The headmaster was a lunatic, but a marvellous man. He maintained that the school was a little fort of culture in the middle of the Philistines, and when I was in the 4th form I won the school essay prize. On a Friday afternoon the headmaster would do a great list, like theatre, and make a little speech and anoint the winner. When everyone had left he called me aside and he said: 'Cooke, if you go on like this one day you will write for the Manchester Guardian.' And I almost fainted. I mean, the prospect was just too impossible, you know. It was the Holy Grail.

"Then one day in 1929 this play Jew Suss came to Blackpool. It was the last days of the actor-manager, and Peggy Ashcroft's first. Somehow I wangled my way into the cast, playing a sort of spear-carrier. On the basis of the rehearsal I wrote a review and sent it to the Manchester Guardian and it appeared the morning after the opening night.

"As a result of that, I offered to write occasional reviews of the Cambridge Festival Theatre, which was an experimental theatre quite remarkable in its day, and that's how I started with the Guardian."

After leaving Cambridge, Cooke replaced Stanley Baldwin's son, Oliver, as the BBC's film critic. But a visit to America on a Commonwealth Fund Fellowship in 1932 changed his life. He moved to the US permanently in 1937, took citizenship in 1941, and came to know and understand the country as well as any American before or since.

Cooke began broadcasting his Letters — he calls them "talks" — in 1946. He still bashes them out on an ancient Royal typewriter on the morning they are recorded. As Nick Clarke writes in his new biography: "The Letter was originally devised as a 13-week series. It lasted 50 years. At the start his brief was to get away from the grim seriousness of wartime reporting, and concentrate on "the springs of American life, whose bubbles are the headlines". For 14 minutes, he could talk about anything that interested him to a "very mixed audience, from shrewd bishops to honest carpenters". The challenge was "to explain in the most vivid terms the passions, the manners and the flavour of another nation's way of life". Half a century and some 5 million words later, the formula remained unchanged.

Cooke had been filing pieces from the US for the Times and Herald when the Manchester Guardian beckoned again. In 1945 the paper still had no regular America correspondent: it had made do with regular contributions — sent by boat — from a string of distinguished American journalists, including Walter Lippman and Bruce Bliven, editor of the New Republic.

The MG's editor, A P Wadsworth, cabled Cooke and asked him to report on the founding of the United Nations. "Of course I shudder now, but I said, 'Fine.' I was in San Francisco for nine weeks where I wrote a piece each day for the Guardian and did two broadcasts at 2am.

"They were setting up the Security Council, the economic and social council. It was immensely dull, but when you're young, nothing's dull. I had about three or four hours' sleep a night and lost about 15lb. I came back to New York and slept about 10 hours a night for a week, and then I got a letter from Wadsworth saying he would like me to keep on reporting the UN. In 1946, Wadsworth decided America was here to stay and they needed a permanent correspondent."

Cooke was paid nearly £500 a year and asked not to cable if a letter would serve. He was to write for the paper for the next 26 years.

Cooke insisted on being based in New York, travelling to Washington for three days every fortnight. One of his first assignments was to cover the two trials of Alger Hiss, a senior State Department official of Roosevelt's New Deal years who was charged with betraying US secrets to the communists. Cooke realised the significance of the case sooner than any of his colleagues and wrote a book about it, A Generation On Trial, in 1950. A history of the Guardian notes: "It was probably those reports of the Hiss trials that established Cooke as required reading at British universities."

His introduction to his book, America, gives some idea of his range: "I covered everything from the public life of six Presidents to the private life of the burlesque stripper; from the black market in beef to the Black Panthers; from Henry Kaiser's Liberty Ships to Francis Chichester's Gypsy Moth sailings into Staten Island; from the Marshall Plan to Planned Parenthood; from Senator Joseph McCarthy's last stand to the massacre of Muhammad Ali by Joe Frazier." He befriended presidents, but he also charmed Charlie Chaplin and became a close friend of Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall.

THE DEMAND for US news meant that the Guardian soon appointed another correspondent in Washington, a Canadian named Max Freedman. In the early days, communications were primitive. "The way it worked was, Max first telephoned me and I dictated my piece to him. He then called the Guardian and dictated both pieces. Before the cable was laid you went through Algiers or Tangier and the line was appalling. I don't know why I never got cancer of the throat."

'No paper matters any more. [Television] has transformed the whole business of what is news, the effect on you and your picture of the world. I don't think we need the print medium at all.'

The relationship with Freedman was fraught, and Cooke evidently still nurses bitter feelings over his former colleague. "Max was terrific, but a fatal buddy of the Kennedys. Fatal — and the same with LBJ, and it ruined his writing." There were difficult turf wars over who covered what, which still rankle.

But Cooke loved working for Wadsworth, and can recite cables from his editor 50 years ago, including the occasion in June 1948 when Wadsworth agreed that he should take a break from covering the Marshall Plan to write about the 100th anniversary of the Gold Rush. The cable simply read: "Go California. Why do we employ Reuters?" His relationship with Wadsworth's successor, Alastair Hetherington, was not quite the same. "We remained polite all through our lives together. But there was a strain.

"The last of the old guard I met was Neville Cardus. I had written an account of the fight between Sugar Ray Robinson and Randolph Turpin in September 1951. He wrote and said it was the best piece he'd ever read on boxing and he kept it in his pocket. I wrote back and told him that as a boy of 12 I was mad for cricket and that one day at a festival in Blackpool I'd seen him with all the big guys and he'd given me his autograph. The next time I went to London we had dinner. He was very tart, but very funny.

"Cardus was the first MG man to be knighted. When that happened, a concert was thrown in his honour with his choice of music. I asked him, 'What did the Guardian do for you?' He said: 'Alastair gave me a glass of sherry.'"

Nick Clarke notes how Cooke won praise for his coverage of John F Kennedy's assassination in 1963 — which he wrote from television broadcasts in New York, aided by his 14-year-old daughter, Susie, who watched different channels in another room. Cooke was also present in the Los Angeles hotel where Bobby Kennedy was murdered. His handwritten account of the scenes in the Ambassador Hotel became one of the most powerful reports he ever filed. He said later: "Only by the wildest freak is a reporter, after many years on the hop, actually present at a single accidental convulsion of history."

The relationship between Cooke the Guardian was not always easy. Celebrating his anniversary in 1968, a Guardian editorial said: "Cooke is a nuisance. He telephones his copy at the last moment, so that everything else has to be dropped to get it into the paper. He says that he will be in Chicago and turns up in Los Angeles. He discards the agreed subject to write about something which has taken his fancy . . . But we think he's worth it, and we love him just the same."

Cooke's heyday as a writing journalist coincided with the period when British papers still had considerable influence in Washington. "The Manchester Guardian — anybody in power who knew anything would see you. With the MG it was the merchant class — the liberals and the Jews who came from the 1848 Revolution when the families split and set up cultural Manchester, Baltimore and St Louis. So when I went to St Louis there were grandsons of people who knew that the Guardian was the great liberal paper of Europe."

He can pinpoint the day when he knew the influence of newspapers was over. "The moment of trauma was September 1951, the Japanese Peace Conference — it was the first political event ever transmitted across this continent. All the foreign correspondents in the Opera House in San Francisco were put in the extreme back of the top gallery, looking at these midgets on stage there.

"*I REMEMBER* seeing a couple of characters I couldn't identify and I suddenly realised Jane, my wife, would be watching. So I went down the steps and I found a booth and I telephoned her in New York and I said, 'Who's the guy in the electric blue suit with brown shoes?' She said, 'It's Governor Warren, of course.' I said, sweating, 'Who's he sitting next to?' She said 'He's sitting next to [Dean] Acheson.'"

"'Oh,' I said, and I never forgot that. I thought: 'This is going to make such a change.' Alastair [Hetherington] persisted in thinking that the 'well-informed man' would continue to want to read what had happened. I said to him: 'It's all over.'

"For the longest time, they pretended it didn't exist. Sometimes when I'd done one of my talks Alastair would call me and say: 'Why don't you write that up?' I'd say: 'It's too late, Alastair.' Very early on, I got into toying with a switch.

"In the first year a whole vocabulary went out of the window with the talks. You know, when you write for the Guardian you write what comes to mind because you assume the reader knows or would look it up. But I'd rather say 'carry on' than 'implement the directive' on a talk, you know. That's been my ambition ever since — to write like telling someone about an aunt, you know.

"I think Alastair to the end thought what a nuisance television was. It got in the way of the real medium. No paper matters any more. There are about 40 television channels which I tap and use. I've got thousands of leg men. It has transformed the whole business of what is news, the effect on you and your picture of the world. I don't think we need the print medium at all. I no longer talk about the press."

And with that he drained the last of his whisky and announced that he was off to the theatre.



A meteor streaks through the California sky over the Mojave desert in this 30-minute exposure photograph taken last week, which also captures the light of stars as the Earth rotates. The Leonid meteor storm — particles hitting the atmosphere as the planet passes through the debris of comet Temple Tuttle — was the greatest natural light display since the comet last passed in 1966 PHOTO: REED SAXON

Notes & Queries Joseph Harker

***WHAT* is the origin of the expression "white elephant", used to describe an ambitious, but failed or redundant project?**

SIMPLE. The Millennium Dome takes off into outer space from Greenwich at midnight on December 31, 1999, and promptly gets caught in a time warp. When it then lands somewhere in prehistoric Africa the tribespeople are, strangely enough, unable to find a use for it. They are, however, impressed enough by its sheer size to name it after the largest animal they know. — *Benjamin Wright, Hertford*

THE original notion conveyed a gift that is not merely useless but a burden to the receiver, and was brought into English usage in the 18th century. Travellers had observed the habit of Siamese kings, who gave albino elephants to courtiers who annoyed them. Because of their rarity, the beasts were, by custom, to be pampered with the most lavish food and kept in the utmost luxury.

Thus, what appeared to be a blessing actually presented the troublesome courtier with the dilemma of insulting the king by refusing the gift, or being ruined by accepting it. Most quickly found reasons for leaving Siam — exactly what the king intended. — *Garrick Alder, London*

***HOW* long should one wait in a traffic jam before turning off the engine?**

TURN it off immediately. The traffic jam is bound to clear as soon as you do so. — *Daniel Fox, Thaxted, Essex*

SO MUCH depends on the car and conditions. We give an average figure of four minutes, but in the case of more modern cars it could be as little as one minute. The object is to avoid the engine cooling down too much, as the consequent "cold start" exhaust emissions could be worse than the fuel and emissions saved by cutting the engine. Exhaust catalysts need heat input to keep them working properly, and may well be running too cold in low-speed traffic. And you need to be able to see when the traffic is going to move again. — *John Stubbs, Head of Technical Policy, Automobile Association, Basingstoke*

***HAS* Viagra received more free publicity than any other commercial product in history?**

HEROIN has achieved far more free publicity than Viagra over the years, thanks to the current policies of prohibition.

From what was once a safe over-the-counter medication that could be purchased at a pharmacist at very little cost we now have a product which costs approximately A$50 per dose and markets itself in a way that makes other direct marketing schemes look amateurish. When I last checked the cost of a week's supply of pharmaceutical-grade injectable opiate, or morphine, it was about A$3 for about a week's supply. This gives a mark up of 10,000 to 20,000 per cent for an illicit product of inferior quality. All this with no patent, no research and development and no legal responsibility to the consumers. A great business opportunity if ever there was one. — *Dr David Helliwell, Nimbin, NSW, Australia*

***IS THERE* a Mr/Mrs/Ms Zimmer who gave their name to the walking frame?**

THE Zimmer frame was one of the many medical marvels to be invented, designed, patented and distributed by the Zimmer surgical supply and pharmaceutical company set up in Wales during the post-war boom years. This company was the brainchild of my great-uncle Reginald Diggins and a friend. They had success with many gadgets, including a circular saw that could slice through rock but not butter. — *Aime Godfrey, London*

***I HAVE* heard that the phrase "bringing coals to Newcastle" actually refers to the Newcastle in Australia. Is this true?**

NO, THE expression antedates the Australian municipality by about three centuries. — *Philip Grew, Milan, Italy*

THE phrase most certainly applied to the English Newcastle well before there was an Australian one. Daniel Defoe in A Tour Through The Whole Island Of Great Britain in 1724-6 tells us that: "From hence the road to Newcastle gives a view of the inexhausted store of coal and coal pits . . . when in this country we see the prodigious heaps, I might say mountains, of coals, which are dug up at every pit, and how many of those pits there are; we are filled with equal wonder to consider where the people should live that can consume them." — *M J Owen, Midland, Mississippi, USA*

Any answers?

***THE* inscription "Salecnyos Bos Leo Seticanvs" is cast into an old brass bell I recently acquired for gate-slide mounting. Can anyone translate it? —** *G Wooldridge, Weybridge, Surrey*

***IS IT* true that turning the water to cold at the end of a shower boosts the immune system?—** *Rebecca Scott, Wimbledon, London*

***WHY* do we "smell a rat" when we think something is amiss? —** *David Spilsburg, Cannon Hill, Birmingham*

Answers should be e-mailed to weekly@guardian.co.uk, faxed to 0171/+44171-242-0985, or posted to The Guardian Weekly, 75 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3HQ.
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Letter from Sri Lanka Rosamund Man

Raining coconuts

A COMMOTION on a sunny day, at 7.51am precisely, means only thing: the coconut picker has arrived. He is tiny, stocky, bow-legged (hardly surprising), almost toothless when he smiles, which he does frequently, and extremely good at his job. He can't tell the time, is wobbly on the days of the week, yet miraculously always turns up at exactly nine minutes to eight, and on the 37th day after his last visit — excluding any rainy days.

How he works out his calendar is even more of a mystery than his agility at climbing the perilously tall, swaying trees. Bags are gathered, the dogs race off, followed by three cats, the cook, the gardener, and any visiting souls — to help catch, count, instruct, pack and carry. Coconut picking is a social event.

The small, brawny picker steps out of his sarong, the other men hitch up theirs to make neat mini-skirts. A lethal-looking curved knife is tucked into the coconut picker's shorts and a small piece of thick rope is twisted into a figure of eight, then looped round his ankles. He stands at the bottom of the tree, plants each foot firmly round either side of the trunk, raises his arms, hugs the tree in a bear-like grip, and is off. And up. Quickly, in easy rhythm, he silently and swiftly climbs the trunk.

In less than half a minute he is at the top, almost disappearing among the cluster of thick, sharp-edged, fronds. He shouts his warning — the dogs bark frantically, running round the base of the tree in great excitement. The thudding of coconuts falling to the ground comes fast and heavy. Occasionally one of the men, with macho bravado, catches a nut. When I first proffered gardening gloves I was given looks that could kill. It was gently but clearly pointed out that this was no place for me. I retreated, vainly calling the dogs and cats to follow. But then, as now, they were much too happy chasing the rolling nuts around and miraculously avoiding instant death from those tumbling out of the sky.

By the time I feel I am at a safe enough distance to turn around and watch, the picker has slithered down one tree and swooped up another. The first bag is almost full. Slash and drop. Slash and drop. The cook is shouting — she wants some bigger ones. And a few smaller ones — still not ripe, but sloshy inside with the sweet, young water that is called *kurumb*, a heavenly drink for breakfast. She yells delighted approval as a cascade rains down. Another bag is filled: each one holds about 30 coconuts. Now it is time for the Big Tree.

This is a particularly fine specimen. Not just for its size, but the type of nut. It looks no different to my inexperienced eye but it is much prized and rarely seen nowadays. We are the envy of the neighbourhood. For these nuts, the picker levies a 50 per cent surcharge. He has to climb more than 20m into the air, scrabbling his way through the thick branches of jack and kitul palm trees that are interlocked around the coconut's slender trunk.

NOW HE is completely obliterated from view but shouts down precise directions as to where he is going to hurl these whoppers. Even the animals seem to know this is a special tree. They sit, quiet, at a respectable distance from the falling missiles. The picker is delighted: we have 19 specimens from the tree today, an all time record for one pick and extra cash for him. And that also means especially fine *pol sambols*, the delicious side dish made from grated coconut, pounded chilli, limes and onions, for all of us.

The small figure slithers down into view again: broad smiles, toothless from him, very toothy from the dogs. Nuts are retrieved, counted, bagged, carted off. Sarongs are donned again. Cups of hot, sweet tea and warm new bread are placed on the table. Spoonfuls of fiery red chilli are pounded into the soft pile of freshly grated coconut flesh. We have another 109 coconuts outside. It took only one hour. But it was hard and hot work. The cold shower was welcome. The grin is contented. Breakfast good.

A Country Diary

Simon Rice

FIGOLS de Tremp, Catalonia: The vapours and low cloud that remained from the storm, the latest in a tempestuous few weeks that marked the transition from summer to autumn, cover the surrounding sierras, forcing raptors into the broad depression of the Conca de Tremp. Here the rising sun draws the fog upwards, clearing the valley floor by mid-morning and revealing snow on the distant Pyrenees. Weak thermals form over exposed rocks, and east-facing escarpments develop uplifts which the enormous birds use to regain height after feeding in the valley.

A pair of golden eagles from the Serra de Montllobar glide southwards as they seek a break in the ridge. Soon two griffin vultures, oldster and youngster, appear, making for their colony in the Congost de Mont-rebei. But a posse of six ravens waits above them. They dive alone or in pairs on the elder bird and, like fighter planes harassing a battered bomber, peck at the wing-tip feathers, undercarriage and tail. Soon the vulture gives in, the widely splayed feathers close to sharp points, the tail forms a continuous trailing edge with the wings some 2m across, and the head sets deep into the neck to glide, with amazing acceleration, away from the pack. The combatant ravens re-group above a woody knoll, where in the next weeks they will flock — no, swarm — to display spectacular plunging and tumbling dives. After their third attempt our vultures abandon the southerly route and head west to the Coll de Montllobar itself, a 300m climb above the village.

Later we pick pears, figs and the very last of the sweet muscatel grapes under the gaze of a fluttering kestrel. The clack of hazel-switch on almond greets us from the orchards near the house. Our elderly neighbours have arrived from Barcelona for the harvest. Another sign of the passing of autumn, and a reminder that a dozen tasks cannot be put off any longer before winter sets in.

Keeping an eye on the minder

TELEVISION
Nancy Banks-Smith

THE minders of Iraq's Ministry of Information (**Modern Times**, BBC2) are there to keep an eye on visiting journalists. With monkey logic, Sean McAllister kept an eye on his minder. It made an unexpectedly poignant film.

Then, as now, Saddam had avoided confrontation at the last moment. The journalists were going home. The minders were being laid off. For Kifah, McAllister's minder and Kevin Keegan's greatest fan ("Oooh, I will pay all of my life just to make a chat with him"), it was a body-blow. He had earned more in one week from journalists' tips — $120 — than in the eight years since the Gulf war.

McAllister went with him to a football match, the short route to his heart. Kifah invited him home.

It was bleak. His mother (who had been standing on a box talking over the wall, like a tiny Les Dawson) hobbled in to welcome him. She broke her leg in 1991 when the electricity failed during an air raid. "She was so frail. So when she came from the upside down, she fell." The room seemed to have been burgled by peculiarly thorough thieves. "I sold my records. They are my life. Elvis. Andy Williams. Frank Sinatra. Love Story was a gift from my girlfriend. I had to sell it. Life is very difficult during the embargo, believe me. I couldn't build a house. I couldn't have a car. I couldn't marry and have a woman. I couldn't do anything. Just struggling for being alive."

His hands moved over the empty walls of his bedroom, where his posters had been. "Here was Trevor Brooking. He was captain of West Ham United. Here was Archie Gemmill when he was captain of Scotland. In 1991 we needed a fire, so we burned them." Even Bobby Moore.

"I can't forget Bobby Moore. He hold the World Cup 1966. What a person! He is like a movie superstar. Blond, tall, very beautiful with his . . ." He stroked invisible sideburns. Kifah seems to live in a time of yellowing cuttings.

When he dreams of exotic places, he is in Stoke City and West Ham.

"I had many dreams to see all over the world. One day I'm going to see all over the world. Life is very beautiful but we complicate it. When I was a child I felt like the world would open his arms for me. I didn't realise that life would keep me here in my home." He sold his watch to buy McAllister a meal.

"When my guest is satisfied, that means something very, very important. That is to me more important than my watch. It means to me too much because you are coming from the other side of the world. Maybe you will remember me all the life. You will remember me." And his smile stretched so wide his big moustache seemed to be measuring it.

Wrappers (BBC2) is an original little series about the things we buy, and why.

There was a time, curls of gold, when nothing came ready-wrapped. Biscuits were in boxes. Soap was in bars. Sweets were loose — or, in the case of Bluebird toffee, immovably set in a tin tray, with a little hammer to smash it into shards. You could have stabbed someone with a dagger of Bluebird toffee and eaten the evidence. Unwrapped loaves had crusty curls that you broke off and ate on the way home.

Then Force put breakfast in a box. With snake-oil salesmanship unequalled until Ovaltine discovered night starvation, Force claimed wheat was a wonder food. It explained on the packet: "Brain workers are driven into dyspepsia, nervous prostration and various diseases because of the lack of the kind of food demanded by nature from which to rebuild the daily loss occasioned by brain and nervous work." This man has only a nodding acquaintance with the English language, but he understands my own predicament perfectly. And yours too, no doubt. We just wear ourselves out being brainy. If "various diseases" is a little unspecific, perhaps he is just being delicate.

Harvey Kellogg, not to be outdone, claimed his flaked corn would "curb the unnatural desires of the young". And we all know what they are. Considering how many cornflakes have been shovelled down the throats of the young, I think we should all ask for our money back.

An Irish dream

THEATRE
Michael Billington

HISTORY, said Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, "is a nightmare from which I am trying to escape". But may it not also offer lessons from which we can learn? The brilliance of Stewart Parker's **Northern Star**, revived by Stephen Rea for this year's Belfast Festival, is that it embraces both possibilities: it sees history, depending on your perspective, as a hermetic prison and a potent metaphor.

Rea's revival, for Tinderbox Theatre Company and Field Day, could hardly be better timed or placed. Parker's play, premiered in 1984, deals with the United Irishmen's abortive uprising of 1798, in particular with the fate of the leading Presbyterian radical Henry Joy McCracken, who was hanged by the British. In its vision of Protestant and Catholic finding a common cause ("There is strength in union, weakness in dissent," cried McCracken, sounding not unlike John Hume), the play has a burning relevance at a time when peace is hanging by a thread. It is also being staged in the beautiful, elliptical First Presbyterian Church in Belfast's Rosemary Street — not only the starting point for the play but the hub of the radical culture it describes. Short of seeing Hamlet at Elsinore, you could hardly find a play that comes closer to home.

But the wit of Parker's play lies in its dazzling Joycean structure. It shows McCracken, after the defeat at Antrim, hiding away with his mistress and their child in a ruined cottage outside Belfast. In his final hours McCracken surveys the Seven Ages, of both his own life and the attempt to forge a united Ireland, in the style of famous Irish playwrights ranging from Sheridan and Boucicault to Behan and Beckett.

But what is the point of Parker's astute act of ventriloquism? Partly, I suspect, sheer virtuosic delight: he was always a writer who handled serious issues comically, and here he seems to relish parodying everything from the ingenious paradoxes of Wilde ("You appear determined to provoke a quarrel with me — I do hope it will lead to violence") to the incantatory rhetoric of Synge ("Isn't there a kind of glory rising up amongst us?"). But there is also clearly a serious purpose behind the literary device — to suggest that Ireland can achieve unity only by acknowledging its plurality, and that the best way to escape from the prison of the past lies in celebrating art and reason rather than mythologising violence.

In the end, this is very much a play about history. Parker sees 1798 as a national turning point — a moment when there was a dream, however botched or stillborn, of a united Ireland. But he also warns against the dangers of sentimentalising or mis-remembering the past.

Idealistic about the future but clear-eyed about the past, Parker's play is admirably staged by Rea on a Bob Crowley set that sticks its tongue out at the audience through a long central ramp and plays on the church's intimacy and warmth. Conleth Hills's vibrant McCracken gives the play an energetic centre, Annie Farr is loyally spirited as his mistress, and Sean Campion is impressive in a variety of roles from a Wildean Wolfe Tone to a Shavian redcoat arguing that "the whole history of Ireland is a civil war".



Peace in our time . . . Sean Campion in Northern Star PHOTO: PHIL SMYTH

Who would you cast as a lonely paranoid fantasist who has difficulties with girls? The charismatic Ewan McGregor would not instantly leap to mind. But, although cast against type, he acquits himself extremely well in Denis Lawson's swift, sharply edited revival of David Halliwell's 1965 play, **Little Malcolm and His Struggle Against the Eunuchs**.

Its hero is a sacked Huddersfield art school student, Malcolm Scrawdyke, who plots fiendish revenge. He forms, with the help of three disciples, the Party of Dynamic Erection to stage a putsch against his former principal and to wage war on all intellectual eunuchs. But, after the beating up of a girl who vainly seeks to help him, he is exposed in his true colours as little more than a sad bedsit Hitler.

The success of the play lies in its comic parody of any tinpot fascist movement. First a leader emerges who attracts a group of tame acolytes. Then comes the expulsion of one of the party as a demonstration of personal power. That is inevitably followed by an act of gratuitous violence which reveals the level of panic and fear.

Mixing elements from The Trial, Lord Of The Flies and Billy Liar, Halliwell shows a lunatic game gradually acquiring a deadly reality. The obvious weakness is that we see through Scrawdyke long before anyone else. One wonders why none of his companions, however seduced by his rhetoric, gets the point.

But in Denis Lawson's production the piece cracks along as such pace that one's intellectual doubts are suspended. And, even if it is difficult to accept McGregor as a man reduced to tongue-tied, virginal gaucheness in the presence of the girl who invades his patch, he still gives a commanding performance.

It proves conclusively McGregor can hold a stage. He is also strongly supported. Sean Gilder as the duffel-coated, fantasy novelist Nipple suggests the kind of toothily genial figure who lives in the world of his dreams. Nicolas Tennant is equally good as a nervous nonentity attracted by the charisma of the supposedly strong leader. Joe Duttine and Lou Gish are spot on as, respectively, the seemingly loyal but ultimately treacherous sidekick and the commonsensical Huddersfield girl who sees through Malcolm's monstrous pretensions.

If the play makes for a good evening it is because it pins down the bedsit revolutions of much of 1960s' student life and accurately shows how dreams of power spring from emotional deprivation.

Cinematic chastity

LONDON FILM FESTIVAL
Jonathan Romney

"*TAKE* the Vow of Chastity," festival-goers were urged last weekend. That only applied if they happened to be film-makers, though. It was the slogan on the handbill explaining the rules of Dogme 95, the "brotherhood" of film-makers founded by Lars von Trier. The elusive Dane wasn't in town to present his own controversial Dogme exercise Idiots, but three of his "brethren" were, including Thomas Vinterberg, director of Festen. The extraordinary Dogme manifesto rages against the cinema of "bourgeois romanticism" and proposes the Vow, a set of 10 rules by which all Dogmatists are bound to make their films.

Defending themselves on stage at the National Film Theatre, the Dogme members didn't exactly come across like firebrand provocateurs. Vinterberg and fellow directors Kristian Levring and Soren Kragh Jacobsen amiably confessed that they stuck to the rules as much as they could, and that it was simply fun to work with restrictions.

But there's some suspicion about Rule 10: "The director must not be credited." Then how is it justifiable for a Dogme director to come to the festival and discuss his film? "Oh, that's nothing to do with the film," explains Vinterberg, "that's just marketing."

This year's most eccentric, and certainly most cosmopolitan entries seem to come from Quebecois directors. Denis Villeneuve's stylish **August 32nd on Earth** is about a Canadian couple who fly to Utah in order to conceive a baby slap-bang in the middle of the Great Salt Lake. Then there's **No**, the latest from stage wizard Robert Lepage — a complex meta-farce about Canada's Trudeau years, a terrorist bomb plot and an actress performing a Feydeau farce at Expo 70 in Osaka.

But several stages ahead in the Quebecois globe-trotter stakes is Francois Girard, best known as the director of 32 Short Films About Glenn Gould. His new film, **The Red Violin**, was shot around the world and has dialogue in French, English, German, Italian and Chinese. It's a lavish reworking both of costume drama tradition and of that creaky old genre, the portmanteau movie.

Girard revives a narrative technique beloved of Boys' Own yarns, by following an object (the titular fiddle) through the ages, from Renaissance Italy to modern-day Montreal, via 18th century Vienna, Victorian Oxford and the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

It may sound like a recipe for excess, but Girard's elegantly convoluted shaggy-dog story turns out to be riveting, and more ironically acute than the Tales Of The Unexpected premise might suggest. It may work with the clichés of musical passion — especially in the English sequence, with Greta Scacchi as a bodice-ripping novelist — but it also manages to tweak them very wryly indeed. The film is stylistically dazzling too — gasp at the Vermeer lighting —, with a coolly urbane feel for the modern sequences, featuring Samuel Jackson as a connoisseur who comes under the violin's spell. A virtuoso performance all round.

Sixties sensation . . . Study for 'Twist' (1963) by Bridget Riley

The complete life of Riley

VISUAL ARTS
Alfred Hickling

MAYBE it was when she appeared in Vogue in an Ossie Clark outfit. Or when Salvador Dali came to pay tribute, with his retinue of sycophants and a couple of leopards. Either way, at the height of the sixties Bridget Riley became sabotaged by her own success.

In January 1965, the 34-year-old Riley shot from nowhere to two simultaneous exhibitions that were the buzz of New York. But it wasn't the celebrity status Riley was looking for. A deeply committed artist on an important optical mission, she set out to realign art with the science of perception. Bruised by the adulation, Riley was tormented by the fear that it would be 20 years before anyone looked seriously at her paintings again.

It is getting on for almost double that now and the Abbot Hall Gallery in Kendal, Cumbria, is about as far removed from the international art circus as it is possible to be. Yet with its recent, exclusive staging of Lucian Freud's latest works, this handsome Georgian villa has stealthily hop-scotched into the premier league of contemporary galleries. Having been invited to show a modest selection of current work there a couple of years ago, Riley loved the ambience so much that she decided to come back and bring her favourite paintings with her. Remarkably, this is the first exhibition for 25 years specifically to represent the complete life of Riley (until January 31).

The show has been planned on a personal scale, with much of the work drawn from the artist's own collection. Yet however you choose to exhibit the work, it is obvious Riley will never escape the repercussions of her early success.

To enter the first room is to step straight back into the 1960s. It's impossible to be surrounded by these monochromes, humming from the walls, without the association of Minis and models and you-never-had-it-so-good. In aesthetic terms, they are a linear development from post-Impressionist inquiries into optical perception; in sensory terms, they're like getting stoned.

This is why Riley became the one British Pop artist who instantly conquered America. Her work had an upbeat, instantaneous impact that sat more happily alongside Oldenberg's soft sculptures and Lichtenstein's overblown comic strips than ration-book era British Pop.

Throughout the seventies, Riley tinkered with two new elements: travel and colour. You also notice the work becoming steadily more painterly and precious. At first, it is a surprise to discover just how physically unpretentious her most famous monochrome paintings are. Having become just a little bit scruffy over time, they are mostly unframed and unvarnished, with the predominant media being enamel on board. But when colour came into the equation, so did oils and often unfeasibly large canvases.

It is no surprise, then, to discover that the vast acreage of these was patiently covered by assistants while the artist stood back and pondered colour harmonies. About halfway through the exhibition, the initial exhilaration is replaced by the sense of staring at brightly coloured garage doors and radiators.

These transitional paintings look like colour studies waiting for fresh inspiration to strike. Fortunately, it has, over the past decade, as Riley has discovered the diagonal. It restores the buzz and infuses a light-heartedness into her recent work that enables it to bear any comparison with the sixties sensations.

Still cutting it fine

LONDON JAZZ FESTIVAL
John Fordham

WHEN Dave Brubeck stepped up to the microphone at the Royal Festival Hall 40 years ago, food rationing had only recently ended, rock 'n' roll had replaced crooners, swing and songs about homecoming soldiers, and British jazz was dominated by skiffle and Dixieland revivalism.

Brubeck himself was a controversial figure. Jazz hardliners hated his eclecticism, enthusiasm for European classical and world music devices, his championing of straight composers, and his preference for the spotlight of the concert hall to the bare bulb of the jazz basement. Yet, seeing him this month, one could not imagine an international jazz festival that lacked these features.

Brubeck was in town for the Oris London Jazz Festival, which takes in 20 venues this year. Playing the Festival Hall with a quartet that included the British bassist Alec Dankworth, he was one of the hits of the week, along with South African drummer Louis Moholo, who earlier put together a manic percussion band to support trumpeter Lester Bowie and the remarkable singer Francine Luce.

Brubeck's impact was quite a surprise. Not because the 77-year-old composer and pianist hasn't made his mark, but because So What's New?, the disc of new tunes he was promoting, is a little short of thrilling. But the quartet displayed an eagerness that was initially stoked by the fleet and fluent alto saxophonist Bobby Militello, who stormed through an engaging mêlée of flying Charlie Parkerish double-time, whistling high notes, soul-sax wails and bluesy slurs.

Two fascinating events in the festival confirmed how effectively the programming draws the edges to the centre. One of the events was a howling two-sax blues jam. The other was an indefinable, semi-abstract world music set delivered to a packed Festival Hall that had really come to hear John McLaughlin, the headline act. The audience was completely won over by strength of character and sheer musicality, even though many of them clearly had no idea where the artist in question was coming from.

The blues jam was the encore to hot young saxophonist Joshua Redman's Barbican show when Redman brought the first-half star Joe Lovano back on stage to swap wailing uptempo blues licks, to ecstatic applause.

Lovano, the bulky Cleveland-born saxophonist almost stole the spotlight from Redman. Laconic, melodically oblique tunes crowded in on each other, and Lovano's solos were masterpieces of ambiguous ingenuity. But Redman's unaccompanied tenor build-up to Summertime was a dazzling improvisatory exercise. For technical skill, audacity and imagination, this pairing was a strong contender for pick of the week.

The seductive world music performance was by Portuguese singer Maria Joao — one of the world's most riveting vocalists. Joao performs rarely in the UK but when she does (usually to crowds who have turned up for somebody else), jaws drop.

Working with regular pianist Mario Laginha, Joao splices ringing operatic falsettos, jabbering percussive sounds, confidingly whimsical lyricism, skewed African hi-life, and ferocious free-scat, and her interaction with her partners is both musical and balletic.

McLAUGHLIN remains a phenomenal guitar technician, and his powerful band harks back to his Mahavishnu Orchestra of the 1970s, a pioneering fusion ensemble whose tumultuous sound, wall-to-wall percussion, and chattering melody lines were echoed by the current outfit. But so was the atmospheric work of the other legendary ensemble of jazz-rock fusion — Weather Report. As well as electric keys, McLaughlin had the dry, spiky sound of former Miles Davis saxophonist Gary Thomas in his lineup, which furnished several of the most absorbing episodes.

Respite could have been found the next night at the Barbican, when the brilliant pianist Fred Hersch delivered jazz standards solo in his caressingly classicised style, and the coolly charismatic singer-pianist Diana Krall wound her smoky tones and swinging keyboard lines around American Songbook staples. Krall's command of a public space is as consummate as Joao's, but she does it by manipulating the familiar, rather than skydiving into space.

How to make a farce out of Figaro

OPERA
Martin Kettle

ONE CAN emerge from opera houses in all sorts of moods, but this was the first time that my uppermost feeling was one of anger.

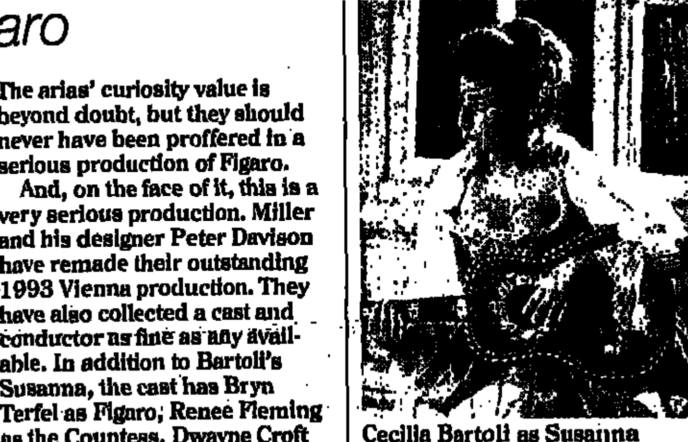
The striking novelty of the New York Metropolitan Opera's production of Mozart's Le Nozze di Figaro has been widely publicised. In several performances in the run, the Met's Susanna, Cecilia Bartoli, substituted two replacement arias for her more familiar "Venite, inginocchiatevi" in Act 2, and "Deh, vieni" in Act 4. The director, Jonathan Miller, objected but was overruled, and made a number of more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger criticisms of the decision.

It is beyond argument that Miller was right, though the substitution was not the main cause of my indignation. The two resurrected arias are by Mozart, after all, and not unknown: they occasionally crop up in recitals. But that is what they are — recital numbers, concert arias, not operatic arias. They show off the singer's facility and range, but do not illuminate either Susanna's character or the mood of the drama.

The first of the arias (which Mozart wrote for a 1789 revival in which Susanna was sung by the librettist Lorenzo da Ponte's mistress) is a slight piece, "Un moto di gioia". The second, "Al desio di chi t'adora", is an ambitious coloratura showpiece. But it is a world away from the irony and sensuality of "Deh, vieni". The arias' curiosity value is beyond doubt, but they should never have been proffered in a serious production of Figaro.

And, on the face of it, this is a very serious production. Miller and his designer Peter Davison have remade their outstanding 1993 Vienna production. They have also collected a cast and conductor as fine as any available. In addition to Bartoli's Susanna, the cast has Bryn Terfel as Figaro, Renee Fleming as the Countess, Dwayne Croft as the Count and Susanne Mentzer as Cherubino. In the pit, James Levine is in charge.

In all kinds of ways, this Figaro lived up to expectations. Terfel is much more artful in the title role these days, but the assurance of his singing is undiminished. Vocally, Fleming is



Cecilia Bartoli as Susanna

wonderful as the Countess. Levine's conducting was exemplary, and this is one of the best Mozart productions Miller has ever staged. The problem is Bartoli. She sings her two arias brilliantly, but they subvert the opera and draw attention to the singer rather than the opera.

The more important issue is whether Bartoli's mezzo is the right voice for Susanna at all. She has the vocal range, but it is significant that, in her first performances in such an important role, Bartoli opted for novelty rather than allowing herself to be judged in the role as it exists.

She often hammed things up, breaking up the line with guffaws and other vulgar distractions that she obviously thought would be audience-pleasers. She also overacted embarrassingly. It was hard not to feel she was determined to draw attention to herself at all costs.

Whatever her merits — which are many — Bartoli does herself no favours by this kind of egocentricity. Sadly, the star-struck audience loved it, and threw bouquets at her feet. Somewhere in the house, though, someone knew and cared enough to boo.

A mind as quirkily textured as stilton

Peter Conrad

Wormholes: Essays and Occasional Writings
by John Fowles
Cape 405pp £18.99

THE wormholes in question are not the slimy homes of those creatures which gobble us up after we die. They are, John Fowles explains, cosmic by-ways, "hypothetical interconnections between widely separated regions of space-time", and they circuitously link the scattered subjects of these essays — islands and antiquarianism, Kafka and butterflies, the Cannes Film Festival and the Falklands conflict.

Less abstract worms are never far away. He lives in an old house with a library of old books and listens nervously for the gnawing of termites. But he does not feel threatened; a writer's individuality is, he says, like "that 'noble rot' which we esteem in certain fruits, wines and cheeses" and the literary personality is made more succulent by the invasion of weevils.

The whimsical pests writhe entertainingly. Fowles is a combination of magus and canny yokel. He pays tribute to "the ancient psyche" and investigates the arcane lore of Homeric Greece and Saxon Wessex; yet for his photograph on the jacket, he wears a straw hat and seems ready for an idle afternoon of what he calls hedge-poking.

One wormhole excavates a route between these different selves, leading from mythopoeia to ecology. Fowles cherishes the myth of a Green England, an unashamed carnal paradise. Then, awakening from this misty reverie, he writes about our need to be respectful custodians of this deconsecrated land.

Fowles's first novel, The Collector, was about a man who entraps a desired woman and seals her beneath his floorboards. As a boy, the novelist himself indulged in this "lethal perversion", though; armed with setting-boards, killing-bottles and caterpillar cages, he captured butterflies, not nubile girls. He now condemns the habit in all its forms, and admits to feeling "an almost metaphysical horror before photographs", which freeze warm, mobile life as if sealing a fly in amber. He hates "the deadness, the fixity — or fixingness" of photography. For him, it is imperative to delight in the wriggling of the worm or the fluttering of the moth: he reveres "the existingness in things".

Wormholes touchingly concludes with a stroll through Fowles's backyard in Lyme Regis, an intact paradise, a haven where Mediterranean orchids apotheosise "the recurrent green universe". This large garden, he modestly notes, "owns me — not the reverse".

Fowles, like his hero D H Lawrence, is an unregenerate pagan, a believer in female deities who range from the original earth mother to the higher-minded "gynocracy" of contemporary feminists in America. Bimbos — such as those who squirm on the beach at Cannes during the festival — are for him sacred houris, temple girls devoted to a religion of fertility. Fowles is a would-be woman. He dottily insists that Homer was female, and thinks of the novel as a feminine form, invented by medieval chroniclers such as Christine de Pisan and Marie de France as a critique of male ambition and aggression. "I consider myself", he says with a sibylline purr, "a sort of chameleon gender-wise." The maggots have done their work well: Fowles's mind is as tangy and quirkily textured as stilton.

Imperfect love

Andrew O'Hagan

Here But Not Here: A Love Story
by Lillian Ross
Faber 240pp £12.99

ONE DAY George Eliot wrote a letter to her friend Mrs Bray: "If there is any one action or relation of my life," she wrote, "which is and always has been profoundly serious, it is my relation to Mr Lewes." The action was simple: to love him, a married man, an editor of the Leader, and to then be encouraged by that love, by the cares and the cautions of deep affection, to make herself into a novelist. But simple isn't the same as easy: theirs was a union without legal or social recognition. They lived how they could, and they made arrangements, and they did their work with honesty and love.

Lillian Ross went to work at the New Yorker in 1945. She was already a good reporter, but the New Yorker was a certain kind of magazine, and although there were a few women around, they were only allowed to write "notes", which they handed to a rewrite man, who put their words through the typewriter to make them sound male. A lot of the people on the magazine were idols to the young Ms Ross. There were editors like Katharine White, who was dedicated to every sentence her writers put down, and William Shawn, who became the editor, and would almost sob if you spoke the names of his favourite contributors.

"Every morning," writes Lillian Ross, "on my way to West Forty-third Street, I couldn't contain my excitement over my good fortune to have become part of that place." The young reporter fell in love with her job. And over time, and several hurdles, she fell in love with William Shawn. Shawn was complicated, not only in his manners — shy and introverted — but also in his character — depressive, regretful, existentially troubled.

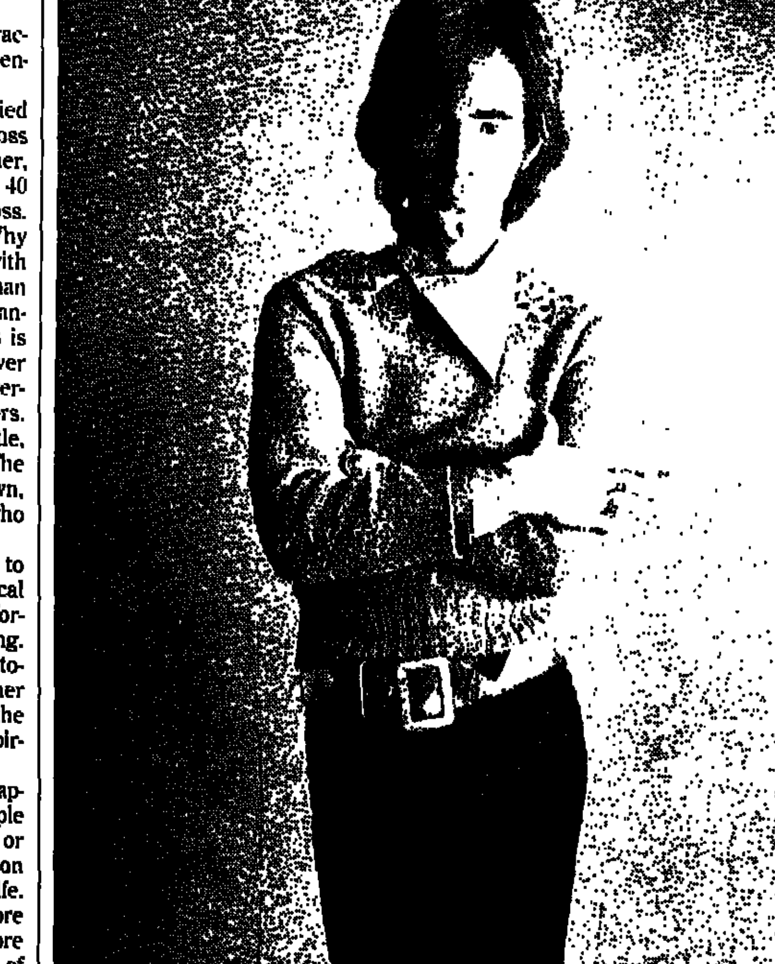
On top of all that he was married with children. But he and Ms Ross had similar feelings for one another, and they made them last for 40 years. "Was I a dope?" asks Ross. "Was there a vacancy in me? Why was I not beset with guilt — or with resentment — about the woman who remained Bill's wife?" The answer to these difficult questions is that Shawn and Ross would never allow themselves to become adversaries. They wanted to be lovers. They were open-minded and gentle, and never free from a little pain. The same can be said of Mrs Shawn, who put up with all this, and who had the character to let it be.

Lillian Ross has found a way to honour every player in this local drama. Her love of Shawn was forever tied to her love of reporting. Here she brings the two loves together in a book that lights up her work, and enlarges our sense of the woman behind it, a woman of spirited devotions.

Some commentators would appear to wish that these good people had lived their lives differently, or that Lillian Ross had stayed quiet on this central relationship of her life. But she has proved herself more equitable than her critics, and more willing to seek truth in the face of convention. "The theoretical formula for my life that I had automatically absorbed from my parents", she writes, "seemed to have become a bit altered, but in the reality of my life, I felt I was living it anyway. It never bothered me that I didn't have a 'Mrs' attached to my name. I never thought of myself as a 'mistress', a term that to me still carries with it an image of a heavily mascaraed woman in a corny movie, wearing a negligee and sitting around sulking and painting her fingernails."

Lillian Ross was not the type: she was curious to see what you could do as a reporter, and she went out to the world and watched. She became one of the best writers the magazine ever had.

In the sixties she adopted a baby, Erik, whom she and Shawn doted on. Shawn would read him articles from the New Yorker, then he'd fold the magazine away, kiss the Rosses good night, and walk 10 blocks to his other life. It wasn't perfect, but they knew that too. Mr Shawn grew old knowing it, and he died knowing it. But it is clear from Lillian Ross's book: the life they had was glorious none the less.



Ossie Clark in a Celia Birtwell scarf and his favourite patchwork belt

Designs on disaster

Susannah Frankel and A N Wilson

The Ossie Clark Diaries
edited by Lady Henrietta Rous
Bloomsbury 402pp £20

OSSIE CLARK dressed the sixties. He wore self-styled collarless "Beatles" suits long before John, Paul, George or Ringo ever thought of such a thing and claimed to have conceived the miniskirt before either Mary Quant or Courrèges got a look in. Name a Swinging London celebrity of that decade and, for that matter, most of the next, and Ossie Clark was, at least in part, responsible for their look. Whether he turned his hand to manipulating body-sculpting snakeskin or diaphanous chiffon he cut cloth in a way that few others have ever been able to before or since.

Then there was the David Hockney connection, which served to add more glamour still to the equation. Ossie Clark and his girlfriend, the fabric designer Celia Birtwell, were inseparable from Hockney when Clark and Hockney were at the Royal College of Art together in the school's glorious heyday.

So the Ossie Clark Diaries should have been a great moment for British fashion. Unfortunately the book charts the terribly sad demise of the designer rather than his meteoric rise. Celia Birtwell, who married Clark in 1969, was wisely reluctant to see the Diaries published at all, let alone in their often thoroughly unpleasant entirety. Her sons, the legal recipients of their father's work — spurred on by Hockney who thought the designer's story should be told — thought otherwise.

Ossie Clark condemns himself, at great length, and entirely in his own words. The designer comes across, for example, as appallingly racist. "She's a typical Jewess with bad skin and I suspect halitosis [though I never got close enough]." "Got dressed and went to Henrietta's for a party with her Indian sister-in-law . . . Drank a lot and had to refrain from making Air India joke — there were so many there."

As his marriage to Birtwell broke down — largely because of his drug abuse, not to mention repeated infidelities with other men — the relationship became increasingly violent, both emotionally and physically. "I beat her and kicked her and her nose was a bloody mess." Tales of the casual sexual encounters towards the end of his life are legion — how he caught crabs, for example, and couldn't afford the lotion to get rid of them. They make for harrowing reading, not only because Clark was terrified by the spectre of Aids but also because they illustrate how passionately Clark hated himself — more than he hated anybody else in his life, and he was a prolific hater. "I picked up a guy, not young or handsome, and he asked if I had a place. We were on our way home when he caught sight of me full-face under a street lamp. 'I don't think I'll bother,' he said."

The relentless misery of the book is due, at least in part, to the fact that Clark's journals for the glory years of 1976, 1977 and 1978 are missing. He had talked to Bloomsbury in 1988 about publishing them but they were unable to go ahead with the project as Ossie Clark was an undischarged bankrupt and so couldn't sign a contract. In the knowledge that his writing might one day be published he summed up his early life in 30 happy retrospective pages until 1974 where the diaries proper begin and he declares himself "as famous as egg fo yung".

From there on in, however, the book deals with his tragic disintegration both personally and professionally — right down to his being forced to rely on Salvation Army kitchens for food and up to his brutal murder by his lover, Diego Cogolato, on August 6, 1996.

In the end, the Ossie Clark Diaries are a lamentable case of too much information on all fronts — from Clark's endless assassination of himself and those he associated with to the frankly laborious footnotes (there are 219 for 1974 alone).

Ossie Clark was one of this century's greatest fashion designers, an inspiration to all young people with a yen to travel to the capital and dare the beautiful people to wear their clothes. The fact that the diaries are, for the time being, all he has left behind him is perhaps the greatest tragedy of all.

Mahler mania

Marianne MacDonald

Diaries 1898-1902
by Alma Mahler-Werfel
Translated by Antony Beaumont
Faber 488pp £25

THESE diaries are gripping. They could be read as the account of a highly talented musician and composer, which they are, but their main interest is their insight into the mind of a beautiful young woman at the turn of the century, bursting with sexual passion, and surrounded by suitors.

Alma Schindler's diary begins when she is 18, living a cultured life in Vienna with her sister, mama, and new stepfather. Her father, the landscape painter Emile Schindler, is recently dead. She is the pupil, friend or lover of many other famous men, including Gustav Klimt, Alexander Zemlinsky, Oskar Kokoschka and Max Burckhard, but when the diaries open she is a virgin burning for music and sex. The delight of this book is the frankness with which she charts both feelings — the entries veer between rapturous accounts of concerts she has attended and men she has enslaved.

At 18, Alma is in love with the painter Klimt, and much of her emotional energy is spent on him. "Mama hinted darkly that I shouldn't walk with Klimt. But he was so delightful. He'll probably call later this week to collect my fan." Mama knows Klimt is not a serious suitor — he is living with another woman. But when she points this out it scarcely improves Alma's mood: there are distinct echoes of Anne Frank. "Suddenly Mama said, 'You don't have any pride whatsoever. You give yourself to all comers.' Without saying a word, I stood up and went into the drawing room. Did Mama have any idea of how deeply she'd hurt me?"

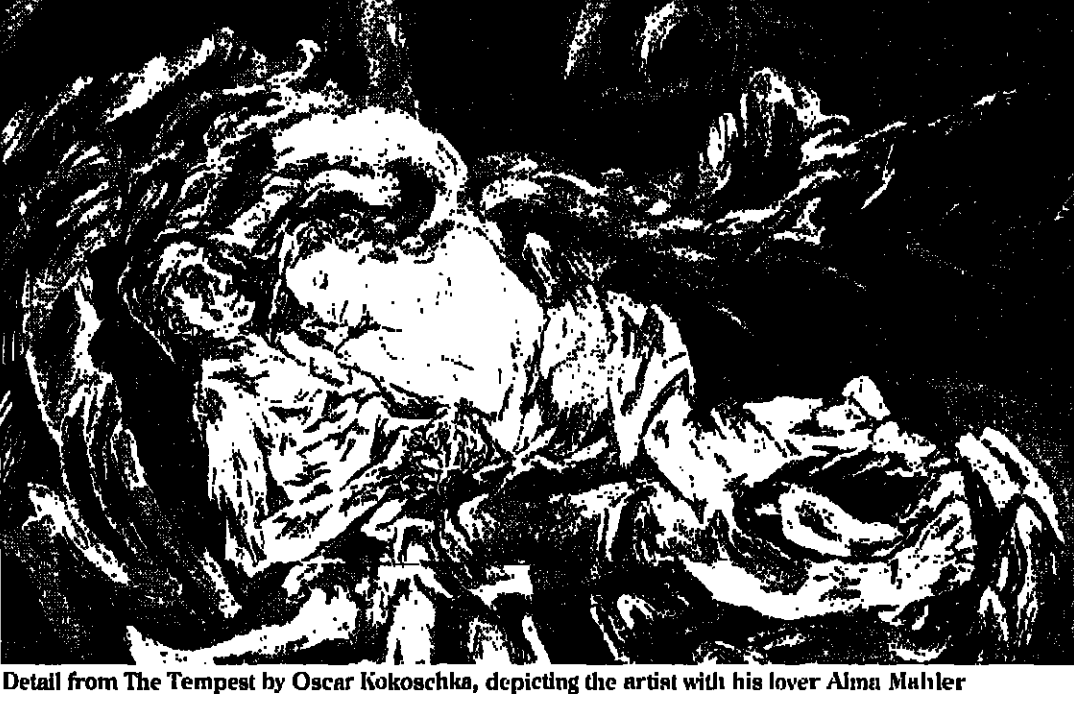
Alma's moods are as varied as her social life. Sometimes she is lamenting having to do housework ("The odour of turpentine, dust, dirt, slovenly servants, discomfort — these are the joys of housework") and other times struggling with her stockings ("I lost my suspender-belt — something I can't abide — and I had to vanish into somebody's front porch"). She is either in the depths of despair or lifted to the heights by her music. And always throbs the beat of sex, louder and louder like jungle drums. Klimt's pursuit continues throughout her 19th year. "In Genoa, I was standing alone in my room. Kl. came in: 'Are you on your own?' 'Yes.' And before I realised it, he'd taken me in his arms and kissed me. It's indescribable: to be kissed for the first time in my life, and by the only person in the world that I love."

Proposals follow from various besotted men. As she seizes the opportunity to kiss them, she is trying to decide her destiny. "I have the choice: to be Alex [Zemlinsky's] wife — just that — with financial restrictions and a neurotic husband who disdains my music. Or to be Muhr's wife — a life of luxury, respected, honoured, loved, spoiled. But — Alex I love. Muhr doesn't mean a fig to me. What should I do?"

The diaries move inexorably toward their climax — maritally, musically, sexually. The great composer Mahler proposes. "I don't know what to think, how to think — whether I love him or not — whether I love the director of the Opera, the wonderful conductor or the man. And his art leaves me cold, so dreadfully cold. In plain words: I don't believe in him as a composer. And I'm expected to bind my life to this man." Three weeks later she gets a letter from Mahler informing her that if she is to be his wife she must stop composing. "My heart missed a beat! My first reaction was to give him up. I had to weep — for then I understood that I loved him. This morning I reread his letter — and suddenly I felt such warmth. What if I were to renounce [my music] out of love for him? He's right. I must live entirely for him, and to make him happy."

They set a date. "This evening the bomb dropped. In bold letters it stood in the papers. 'Mahler engaged.' . . . He was very put out. Everywhere my beauty, my youth & my musical talent are stressed." There are 90 days until the wedding, and she gets more wound up. "[Today] he let me feel his masculinity — his vigour — and it was a pure, holy sensation, such as I never would have expected . . . Nobody knows how I long for him. I'm wearing my hair loose — he loves it that way — and our bodies cried out for union. Oh, to bear his child!"

The entry for New Year's Day 1902 is like a Henry James novel. "I called on Gustav. He gave me his body — & I let him touch me with his hand. Stiff and upright stood his vigour. He carried me to the sofa, laid me gently down and swung himself over me. Then, just as I felt him penetrate, he lost all strength. He laid his head on my breast, shattered — and almost wept for shame." The last entry is on 16 January. "For a long while I've been truly happy. But everything has changed. He wants me different, completely different. And that's what I want as well. But when I'm on my own, my other, vain self rises to the surface and wants to be let free. I let myself go. My eyes shine with frivolity — my mouth utters lies, streams of lies. And he senses it, knows it. I must cast out my other soul. The one which has so far ruled must be banished. I must strive to become a real person, let everything happen to me of its own accord." And so the diary ends.



Detail from The Tempest by Oscar Kokoschka, depicting the artist with his lover Alma Mahler

Ghosts in the machine

Ian Thomson

Phantoms in the Brain: Human Nature and the Architecture of the Mind
by V S Ramachandran and Sandra Blakeslee
Fourth Estate 328pp £17.99

AFTER an unexplained fall, I had an emergency brain operation in one of Rome's less salubrious hospitals. I'd been discovered on the floor with — in best Hitchcock tradition — the telephone dangling off the hook. The caribinieri thought I'd been coshed. Handprints of blood had covered the walls and congealed in the hall where I lay unconscious. Surgery for an impacted fracture and resultant haematoma had left me with a cranial cavity the size of a healthy tangerine.

The quaintly named Dottore Milza (Dr Spleen), who performed the operation, cautioned against the cavity. "You are missing some bone and therefore less thick-skulled than before," he said, and suggested a silver plate to protect my neural circuitry. (For fear of picking up radio signals, however, I opted for a plastic one). We still have no clear idea how the human brain works. It was hardly the Berlitz method, but my Italian had become unaccountably fluent after the injury. Some questions about the brain are so mysterious, so deeply enigmatic, that many scientists simply avoid them.

Quirks of the human mind, however, fascinate Dr V S Ramachandran. Phantoms In The Brain is one of the funniest and most original books on neurology ever written. The author is a leader in the field of brain research yet he remains gloriously accessible to the layman. (Sandra Blakeslee, a well-known American science writer, has helped to iron out some of the big words).

Like Richard Dawkins, Ramachandran continues a tradition of scientific writing from Galileo to Darwin which vanished earlier this century with academic specialisation. It is only recently that science has become, in publishing terms, sexy and pop again.

Written with humility and intelligent generosity, Phantoms In The Brain grips from start to finish. The book is based on Ramachandran's own experiences with neurological patients and takes us to the limit of scientific inquiry. A man loses his arm in a motorbike crash yet continues to feel it moving. Another patient experiences orgasm in his (amputated) foot during sex.

Instead of dismissing these conditions as mere clinical curiosities, Ramachandran believes they provide valuable insight into how the human brain operates.

In response to injury, says Ramachandran, the brain reorganises and re-maps itself, altering the circuitry which most neuroscientists still believe was laid down in foetal life. Lord Nelson experienced the most compelling phantom limb pain after the loss of his right arm; his neural connections were creating a new script, trying to make sense of the pain of the injury.

Another of Ramachandran's patients developed a blind spot in the visual field after a catastrophic head injury. When he looked directly at the lavatory sign WOMEN he failed to see the "W" and "O" and entered with embarrassing consequences.

In the Roman hospital where I lay recuperating, a Tunisian called Mustah was not right in the head after a car crash. Mustah believed his mother and sister had been replaced by duplicates who looked exactly like his real siblings. Was he suffering from Capgras's delusion, a colourful syndrome caused by damage to zones in the brain which specialise in face and object recognition? Some neural damage is darkly hilarious. In 1931, relates Ramachandran, a London plumber attended his mother's funeral only to start giggling as the gravediggers lowered her coffin. Eventually he staggered off among the gravestones loudly guffawing. That evening the same plumber died of severe arachnoid haemorrhage. Brain damage that sets us giggling inappropriately is usually located, says Ramachandran, in the hypothalamus area.

Dr Ramachandran is to be congratulated for writing thrillingly about the deep architecture of our most mysterious organ. In every respect, this is a superb introduction.

Dark and disturbing

Hermione Lee

The Love of a Good Woman
by Alice Munro
Chatto & Windus 339pp £14.99

ALICE MUNRO'S first collection of stories was published 30 years ago. She has written nine books, and her Selected Stories came out two years ago to rapturous reviews. With Eudora Welty, Grace Paley, and Nadine Gordimer (and, more recently, Lorrie Moore) she is one of the finest female short-story writers of our time. But, because she is mainly a short-story writer, she runs the risk of being taken too quietly, treated too mildly. Ah, her admirers sigh, "beautiful", "perfection", "miraculous". Yes. But what they also need to say of The Love Of A Good Woman is that these absorbing and brilliant stories are extremely disturbing, and take us into dark places.

Several of them slowly uncover a hidden act of violence, an accident that scars for life, a bad secret, the breaking of a marriage, an irreparable loss. These grotesque secrets emerge from set-ups where there is a claustrophobic over-proximity, frustration or concealment: "a collaboration in a silence."

In the title story, the corpse of a small-town optometrist is found in his car in an icy river by a gang of boys. Through a wonderfully delicate balancing act between two narratives (Munro loves doing this), the secret story of his murder is revealed to the nurse of a dying woman, who finds her imagination unbearably infected by her patient. In another story, a woman and her grandchildren happen on a horrible household deep in the country on the Lake Huron shore; there's a sense of danger narrowly averted. In another, a young girl is nearly burnt alive trying on the wedding dress that belongs to the wife of her mother's lover — an accident which partly happens because of her confused, tormented relationship to the three adults. In these constricting family homes, the malevolent vindictiveness of some of Munro's characters can take your breath away.

These are accounts of a provincial, rural or small-town Canada still locked in its repressive, colonial past: the past of Munro's own childhood, which she is drawn back to in book after book. Some of these characters escape into the future, like the daughter who, because of her accident with the wedding dress, becomes independent of her messy family, acquiring a "sober, victorious feeling" of being on her own. But Munro prefers to hold them on the edge of a change, to leave them caught up in memory and regret. One of her most eloquent strategies is to make her stories seem to move both backwards and forwards, to be at once anticipatory and elegiac, beginning "the private work of storing and secreting, deciding on his own what should be preserved and how, and what these things were going to mean to him, in his unknown future".

Worth its weight in gold

Mark Cocker

GIVEN its classic combination of endless sunshine and glorious beaches it's not difficult to see why developers targeted Portugal's south coast as a holiday playground for northern Europeans. Today the region known as the Algarve absorbs the lion's share of the $2 billion that the country has earned annually from tourism since the 1980s. And who would want to deny one of Western Europe's least wealthy countries such a welcome revenue?

Yet, equally, few would argue that this development has not exacted an aesthetic and environmental price on the Algarve. Small fishing ports which once huddled around their natural deep-water harbours have spread across vast swaths of the coast in ranks of mass-produced villas or apartments. Barren headlands that previously commanded sweeping views over the Atlantic now bristle with high-rise hotels, while a major holiday centre such as Lagos appears as an immense panorama of white-stuccoed concrete. By night, from across the bay, the place is a fantastic pageant of twinkling lights; by day it has a powerful and glistening presence like a mass of well-oiled muscle.

But the deepest impression left by our visit was not of tourism's desecration of a traditional landscape, but the striking juxtaposition of modern and medieval elements. This spirit of the past resides less in the architecture of the Algarve's historic towns as in its countryside, where the landscape is a patchwork of tiny walled orchards. Four trees — carob, fig, olive and almond — predominate in these groves. Even right in the heart of the tourist centres, wherever there is a vestige of the original ground, these trees are still growing, throwing out blossoms each spring and fruits each autumn.

They reflect a pattern of agricultural production in the Algarve that dates back to the Muslim occupation in the early Middle Ages. In fact the region's name derives from the Arabic Al-gharb — "the West". These Yemeni settlers had a sophisticated knowledge of dry cultivation and were perfectly equipped to make the poor stony soils of the region bloom with their new trees.



ILLUSTRATION: ANN HOBDAY

Of these oriental introductions it is perhaps the evergreen carob that makes the largest mark on the autumn landscape. Their canopies of small, round, tough, holly-green leaves scoop out deep wells of shadow on the baked Mediterranean hillsides and are apparently much favoured by livestock because of their relief from the burning summer sun. No carob tree ever died of thirst, and the local farmers say they live for ever, thriving on land where no other commercially valuable tree would grow. They also produce an abundant crop of bean pods, known as St John's bread, whose flesh is rich in protein and sugars and a highly valued cattle feed. Even the people once toasted and ate them, or processed them for both a sweet syrup and a reputedly good brandy. The seeds are of such consistent size they were used as a measurement of weight (hence the "carat" for assessing gold).

Islam's other great gift to the area is the fig. One particular local variety, an oblong black fruit with yellow flesh, was once famous throughout Europe. The fig tree is cropped four times over the late summer, the first harvest having the highest commercial value. Even in the 12th century, the Muslim scholar Edrisi commented on their exquisite flavour and described how they were exported throughout the West. Now the only fruits remaining on the trees are hard and inedible, but the trees' yellowing foliage still swims with a rich, sugary odour, reminding us of what has passed and what will come again.

Chess Leonard Barden

NICK Pert and Ruth Sheldon brought off a golden English under-18 double in the world youth championships for boys and girls at Oropesa del Mar this month. It was England's best result in these competitive events, which are normally dominated by the former Soviet Union and China.

Sheldon, aged 18, of Manchester, is already an England women's international, but her 9/11 was still a fine score and included wins against all her main rivals. She is presently in India, trying to emulate Harriet Hunt who won the world under-20 girls' title last year. Jovanka Houska, the European U20 bronze medallist, also plays in Calicut with help from Saitek, and this trio's rising talent provides a bright outlook for England women's chess.

Pert, aged 17, did astonishingly well. The Oakham School sixth-former was unbeaten by five strong IMs, took the gold medal from a Russian on tie-break with 8½/11, was awarded his International Master title, and had a rating performance of nearly 2650, the level of an élite grandmaster. Oakham, where Pert won a scholarship, enhanced its growing reputation as one of the world's best chess academies.

R Goletiani (Georgia) v R Sheldon

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d3 g6 4 g3 Bg7 5 Bg2 d6 6 0-0 e5 7 c3 Nge7 8 Nh4 0-0 9 f4 exf4 10 gxf4 f5 11 Na3 Kh8! Frees g8 for the B. **12 Be3 Be6 13 Qe1 Qd7 14 Nf3 Rab8 15 Ng5 Bg8 16 Rf3 h6 17 Rh3 b5 18 Nc2 a5 19 b3 Nd8!** The best move of the game, halting White's attack. **20 c4 Ne6 21 Bd2 b4 22 Rh4 fxe4 23 dxe4 Nxg5 24 fxg5 h5 25 Rd1 Nc6 26 Qe2 Nc5 27 Ne3 Be6 28 h3 Kg8 29 Nf1 Qf7 30 Bf4 Qe7 31 Ng3 Rxf4!** This wrecks White's defences. **32 Rxf4 Qxg5 33 Qf2 h4 34 Ne2 Bxh3 35 Rxd6 Bg4 36 Rd2 h3 37 Qxc5 Nf3+ 38 Bxf3 Qxc5+ 39 Nd4 Bxd4+ 40 Kh1 Bxf3+ 41 Resigns.** An important win against last year's champion.

S Fedorchuk (Ukraine) v N Pert

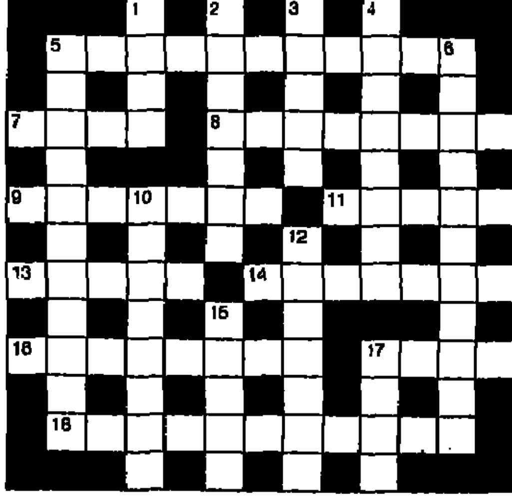
1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Bd3 c5 6 c3 Nc6 7 Ne2 cxd4 8 cxd4 f6 9 exf6 Nxf6 10 Nf3 Bd6 11 0-0 Qb6 12 Nc3 0-0 13 Bg5 Ng4 14 Bh4 Nh6 15 Bg3 Bxg3 16 hxg3 Nf5 17 Bxf5 Rxf5 18 Na4?! 18 Qd2 is dark-square thematic. **Qb4 19 Rc1 Qd6 20 Nc5 b6 21 Nd3 Ba6 22 Qa4 Bc4 23 b3 Bxd3 24 Rxc6 Qf8!** With White's army offside, Black goes for the king. **25 Rfc1 Be4 26 Qa6 Rxf3! 27 Rc8?** 27 gxf3 draws. **Rxf2!** For if 28 Rxf8+ Raxf8 threatens Rxg2+ and Rxa2+. **28 Kh2 Bxg2 29 Rxa8 Bf1+ 30 Resigns.**

No 2551

Robert Huebner v Tigran Petrosian, Biel interzonal 1976. One of the classic grandmaster blunders. A win for Huebner would have made him a world title candidate and knocked out his Soviet rival. The German crowd were rooting for their compatriot in the Swiss town, so when many of them saw the right move for White they began discussing it loudly. But Huebner kept his eyes fixed on Black's threatened Qxf4+, and chose 1 g3?? The audience groaned, and Petrosian went on to win. What should White have played?

No 2550: 1 Qg2 Re8 2 Qf2! Threat 2 Rg8+ and 3 Qxh4. Re4 Guards the Q. 3 Qf5 Re6 If Re8 4 Rg4 Qxh2 5 Qxf6+. 4 Qd5 Threats 5 Qa8+ and Qd8+. Re8 5 Qxf7 and wins.

Quick crossword no. 446



Across

5 Manchester United's football ground (3,8)
7 Nimble (4)
8 Purple or violet gemstone (8)
9 Game — insect (7)
11 Well — treated (5)
13 Strange — card-game (5)
14 Odd (7)
16 Violent criticism (8)
17 Courage needed — by chickens (4)
18 First man in space (4,7)

Down

1 Whirlpool (4)
2 Small cask for fresh water — or sea water? (7)
3 Frequently (5)
4 Riding breeches (8)
5 Chance (11)
6 Hopelessness (11)
10 Graveyard (8)
12 Experience (7)
15 Crest (5)
17 Dress (4)

Last week's solution

SILLYMIDOFF
C R A A O R W
OVERRULED ADO
U G A G T R
NICHE DRYCELL
T H S Y R D
ELAPSE CARNAL
R L A R A Y
POLYGON BELOW
A E U I I J
NUN SUMPTUOUS
E G T U E U E
DEMONSTRATE

Bridge Zia Mahmood

WOULD you rather be declarer in a good contract or a terrible one? You may think this an odd question — of course, you'd prefer to be in a good contract, since you will have more chance of getting a plus score by making it. But from the point of view of the effort you have to put in, it's often a lot easier to be in a terrible contract, since these are a great deal easier to play. A good contract will offer many plausible alternative lines, and choosing the right one is often difficult, while in a terrible contract, you just have to shut your eyes and pray for a miracle. That was South's position on this deal from rubber bridge. He picked up these cards:

♠AQ987 ♥None ♦KJ92 ♣AQ63

and heard his partner open 1♥. He responded the obvious 1♠, and was raised to 2♠ by North. Now, you or I might explore scientifically with a bid of 3♣, or perhaps 3♦, but this South had no time for such niceties. Fortified by an optimistic outlook on life and his third glass of champagne, he settled matters with a jump to 6♠ and awaited the dummy. It was not exactly the stuff of dreams:

♠6543
♥AKQJ2
♦4
♣J95

♠AQ987
♥None
♦KJ92
♣AQ63

West led the ten of hearts. How would you plan the play?

South's first thought was to win the opening lead in dummy and finesse the queen of spades, hoping for East to have the doubleton king. But even if this occurred, he would be stuck in hand after drawing trumps, and would need favourable positions in both hearts and clubs to succeed. So, he won the heart lead and boldly played three more rounds of the suit, discarding all his diamonds. Both opponents followed all the way in hearts, so South was still in the dummy, having lost no tricks. How would you now have continued?

As I said earlier, good contracts present declarer with a number of options, and careful choices have to be made. Once South had got rid of all his diamonds on hearts, he was suddenly in a good contract, and his play was exemplary. Instead of taking the spade finesse, he ruffed dummy's diamond and exited with ace and another spade. This was the full deal:

North
♠6543
♥AKQJ2
♦4
♣J95

West
♠K10
♥10986
♦Q1053
♣1082

East
♠J2
♥7543
♦A876
♣K74

South
♠AQ987
♥None
♦KJ92
♣AQ63

West won the king of spades, but could do nothing — a diamond exit would allow South to ruff in dummy while discarding a club from hand. Another club would be thrown on the fifth heart, and the club finesse would ensure the slam. A club exit from West would leave the defence powerless when the nine was played from dummy. It might have been unlovely bidding — but it was lovely play. ©

Golf

Laura Davies crowns day of triumph

Guardian Reporters

LAURA Davies rounded off an all-conquering day for British golfers last Sunday after Nick Faldo and David Carter had teamed up to win the World Cup, Lee Westwood and David Howell carried off titles in Japan and Australia, and the Great Britain and Ireland team took the world men's amateur team championship in Chile.

Davies held her nerve for a final round of 69 in Las Vegas to finish on 277, 11 under par and win the PageNet Tour Championship, the final event of the season, by four strokes and clinch the first prize of $215,000. The victory ended 20 barren months in the United States for the world No 1, whose father Dave broke down in tears as he watched her triumph, four shots ahead of the Americans Pat Hurst and Brandie Burton and Australia's Karrie Webb.

Faldo had promised to make amends for England never having won the World Cup title since the competition started in 1954, and it was his strength that took him and Carter to a two-stroke win in Auckland.

But it was Carter who made sure of victory with a closing-hole birdie as he went round in a four-under 68 to Faldo's 69, to take them to an eight-under 568.

Westwood shot a one-under-par 70 to win the Dunlop Phoenix in Tokyo by three strokes with a 13-under total of 271 — his second straight tournament victory. The 25-year-old picked up $375,000 for the victory — the largest winner's cheque on the Japanese Tour.

It was his seventh win in the nine tournaments in which he has been in contention this year. Westwood said: "I've been focused and mentally strong all week. Now I'm going off for some karaoke." Darren Clarke of Northern Ireland finished second on 274 after a level-par 71.

Howell won the Australian PGA Championship in Sydney. He led by six shots going into the last round, and won by seven. "It was a dream way to win," he said.

In Santiago, the Great Britain and Ireland amateurs won the Eisenhower Trophy for a fourth time in the tournament's 40-year history, by four strokes from Australia.



Gripping stuff . . . Carter celebrates with Faldo after their World Cup of Golf victory for England in Auckland

Football Premiership: Aston Villa 2 Liverpool 4

Fowler punishes Collymore folly

David Lacey

ASTON VILLA are beginning to look like the man who built his house on sand. If the challenge of John Gregory's team for the championship is to amount to anything more than a nine-week wonder they will surely have to re-dig their foundations.

They also need to reassess the true worth to the side of Stan Collymore, whose outrageous foul on Liverpool's Steve Harkness at Villa Park last Saturday and subsequent second yellow card and dismissal for a retaliatory shove on Michael Owen, who had tackled him knee-high, confirmed the maverick tendencies of this talented but wayward player.

Collymore's over-the-top lunge saw Harkness carried off with damaged knee ligaments. Happily the incident did not spoil the Premiership's most entertaining spectacle of the season so far; helped, it must be said, by mutually inept defending.

The masterful finishing of Robbie Fowler dominated an exhilarating exhibition of attacking football from both teams and inspired Liverpool to the victory which ended the league leaders' 12-match unbeaten Premiership record.

A sharp header that owed everything to anticipation and positioning, a shot potted with a pool hustler's assurance and a first touch to make his third goal a formality confirmed Fowler as one of the country's most dangerous strikers.

Yet Villa, despite conceding two goals in the first six minutes, might have saved or even won the match had the skill and vision of Paul Merson been backed by a return to the defending which saw them let in a similar number in their first nine league games.

"Strikers win matches, defenders win championships," Gregory had declared after Villa forced an efficient scoreless draw at West Ham earlier in the season. Since then the truth of those words has, quite literally, been brought home to him. His team have now conceded nine goals in three matches at Villa Park.

Celta Vigo, whose 3-1 win ended Villa's interest in the Uefa Cup, first exposed a flaw in Gregory's defence, and here Paul Ince caught it ball-watching at a corner as he headed past Michael Oakes after two minutes. Liverpool, like Vigo, then proceeded to tear Villa's cover to ribbons with a quality of passing and movement which bemused Ugo Ehiogu and preyed on the inexperience of the 17-year-old Gareth Barry.

Yet the problem for Villa lay equally in midfield where, without the suspended Ian Taylor, they simply could not cope. Villa have been setting the pace primarily through their ability to hold narrow leads, but since Dion Dublin's arrival from Coventry, Gregory's decision to sacrifice numbers in midfield to accommodate both Dublin and Collymore up front has upset the team's balance.

Whereas Collymore is profligate, Dublin continues to prosper. Having hit a post in the first half he kept Villa in the game at 2-1 early in the second with an excellent goal, beating David James with a perfectly struck shot on the turn.

After Fowler restored Liverpool's two-goal lead Dublin tapped in another from Collymore's low cross, only for Fowler to complete his hat-trick three minutes later. Even with 10 men, after Collymore's departure, Villa might still have denied Liverpool victory had James not pushed Dublin's penalty past a post.

James had been penalised for bringing down Julian Joachim. Within a minute Phil Babb appeared to repeat the foul but the referee Peter Jones did not award a second penalty. This leniency hardly compared with the yellow card shown to Collymore after his challenge on Harkness when practically everyone was expecting red.

A one-match ban means Collymore will miss Villa's next home game, against Manchester United, on December 5. Four days later they travel to Chelsea, and Arsenal are at Villa Park the following Saturday. By then we should all have a better idea of what the pre-Christmas pretenders, and their manager, are made of.

Sports Diary Shiv Sharma

England find winning form again

AFTER three indifferent performances by England's first-choice team in the Euro 2000 qualifiers, a side made up largely of reserves beat an experienced and skilful Czech Republic side 2-0 in an international friendly at Wembley.

The England irregulars found the mood and form which had deserted the more established team since the World Cup, and even showed a bit of style. The Czechs, unbeaten in 10 matches and fielding seven of the team that had lost the Euro 96 final at Wembley, did enough to prove their pedigree but faded disappointingly. England took the lead in the 22nd minute after a Darren Anderton drive beat Petr Kouba comprehensively. By the 39th minute Glenn Hoddle's men were two up, the goal this time coming from Paul Merson.

The Czechs were kept in the game by Kouba, who twice denied England before the hour to keep the contest alive. Two instinctive saves from Nigel Martyn ensured England's victory.

Northern Ireland recovered twice after falling behind Moldova to draw 2-2 in their Euro 2000 qualifier in Group Three at Windsor Park, Belfast. The Moldovans' opening goal came in the 23rd minute when full-back Peter Kennedy was caught ball-watching as Vladimir Gaidamasciuc nipped in front of him to beat Alan Fettis. It was not until 10 minutes before half-time that the Irish managed a response, Iain Dowie powering home a downward header.

The visitors were ahead again eight minutes later when Ion Testimitanu strolled into the Irish penalty area and blasted his drive high beyond the keeper. Another comeback was needed and Neil Lennon supplied it, scooping in a Kennedy header in the 64th minute. Although the Moldova side were reduced to 10 men for the last 25 minutes after Alexandru Curtianu was sent off, the Irish could not find the winner.

In Group Eight, Yugoslavia striker Predrag Mijatovic dented the Republic of Ireland's hopes of qualifying when his goal in Belgrade was enough to give his country a winning start to their campaign.

TORRENTIAL rain came to England's rescue on the final day of the first Ashes Test in Brisbane. Australia dominated the match from the outset with a commanding first innings total of 485. After England's response of 375, Australia followed with a lightning 237 for 3 declared, setting England an unlikely run chase of 348 to win.

After a steady start, led by Mark Butcher and Nasser Hussain, wickets started to tumble to the spin of Stuart MacGill and Mark Waugh, and when bad light, followed by a tropical downpour, ended play early, England were clinging to the ropes at 179 for 6. Australia's fast bowler, Glenn McGrath, was man of the match with six for 85 in the first innings.

SOUTH AFRICAN captain Hansie Cronje, with an unbeaten 158, led Free State to an astonishing two-wicket victory over the West Indies on the final day of their four-day match at Bloemfontein. The home side were bowled out for 67 in their first innings in reply to the visitors' total of 316. But they fought back to dismiss the West Indies for 188 the second time round and went on to score the 438 needed for victory — the highest successful fourth innings total by a South African team against a touring side.

HUNDREDS of angry shareholders besieged Manchester United's directors at the club's annual general meeting which exposed deep antipathy to the proposed $1 billion takeover by BSkyB. Speakers accused the club's chairman, Sir Roland Smith, and chief executive Martin Edwards of trying to "sell out" to Rupert Murdoch's company, and pleaded for a change of heart over their backing for the deal. The meeting was the first chance for shareholders to vent their feelings over the takeover, now referred to the Monopolies & Mergers Commission and on hold until next year.

KNOWN football hooligans will be banned from travelling to matches abroad even if they have never been convicted in the courts, under fresh government curbs on hooliganism. The package of measures, billed as the Government's toughest assault yet on football-related offences, will target not only rowdies but touts selling tickets on the black market and fans chanting racist abuse on the terraces

Football Results

FA CARLING PREMIERSHIP
Aston Villa 2, Liverpool 4; Blackburn 0, Southampton 2; Derby 0, West Ham 2; Everton 1, Newcastle 0; Leeds 4, Charlton 1; Leicester 2, Chelsea 4; Middlesbrough 2, Coventry 0; Sheff Wed 3, Man Utd 1; Spurs 2, Nottm For 0; Wimbledon 1, Arsenal 0.
Leading positions: 1, Aston Villa (played 13-points 28); 2, Man Utd (13-25); 3, Arsenal (14-24).

NATIONWIDE LEAGUE
First Division
Bristol City 1, Stockport 1; Bury 1, Grimsby 0; Huddersfield 2, Bradford City 1; Ipswich 0, Bolton 1; Oxford 2, Port Vale 1; Portsmouth 2, WBA 1, QPR 1, Sheff Utd 2; Sunderland 2, Barnsley 3; Swindon 2, C Palace 0; Tranmere 1, Norwich 3; Watford 4, Crewe 2; Wolves 3, Birmingham 1.
Leading positions: 1, Sunderland (19-40), 2, Watford (20-35); 3, Ipswich (19-35).

Second Division
Blackpool 0, Preston 0; Bournemouth 5, Burnley 0; Fulham 2, Chesterfield 1; Lincoln 2, Luton 2; Macclesfield 1, Walsall 1; Man C 0, Gillingham 0; Millwall 1, Bristol R 1; Northampton 0; Notts Co 1; Colchester 3; Oldham 3, Wrexham 2; Stoke 2, York 0; Wigan 0, Wycombe 0.
Leading positions: 1, Stoke (19-40); 2, Fulham (17-39); 3, Walsall (19-36).

Third Division
Brighton 0, Halifax 1; Cambridge 2, Darlington 1; Carlisle 0, Rotherham 0; Chester 1, Rochdale 1; Exeter 0, Shrewsbury 1; L Orient 2, Brentford 1; Mansfield 5, Barnet 0; Scarborough 1, Hartlepool 2; Scunthorpe 3, Hull 2; Southend 1, Plymouth 0; Swansea 2, Cardiff 1; Torquay 0, Peterborough 1.
Leading positions: 1, Halifax (19-35); 2, Scunthorpe (19-33); 3, Cambridge (19-33)

SCOTTISH PREMIER LEAGUE
Aberdeen 0, St Johnstone 1; Celtic 5, Rangers 1; Dundee U 0, Dundee 1, Hearts 2, Dunfermline 1; Kilmarnock 0, Motherwell 0.
Leading positions: 1, Rangers (15-30); 2, Kilmarnock (15-25); 3, Celtic (15-23).

SCOTTISH LEAGUE
First Division
Airdrie 0, Ayr 2; Morton 0, Falkirk 3; Hamilton 2, Hibernian 2; Raith 2, Stranraer 0; St Mirren 0, Clydebank 0.
Leading positions: 1, Ayr (16-32); 2, Hibernian (15-29); 3, Falkirk (16-29).

Second Division
Arbroath 1, Partick 0; Livingston 2, Alloa 1; Queen Sth 0, East Fife 0; Stirling A 3, Forfar 1; Inverness CT 1, Clyde 1.
Leading positions: 1, Livingston (16-37); 2, Inverness CT (16-34); 3, Clyde (16-26).

Third Division
Brechin 0, Ross Co 1; Cowdenbeath 2, Albion 3; Dumbarton P, Montrose P; E Stirling 1, Queens Pk 1; Stenhousemuir 1, Berwick 2.
Leading positions: 1, Ross County (16-38); 2, Brechin (16-33); 3, Stenhousemuir (16-27).